



LTC Workbook 5

Behavioural activation

A self-help guide for those living with long-term health conditions



0300 365 2000

Contents of this workbook

<input type="checkbox"/> Boom and bust cycle.....	3
<input type="checkbox"/> What is low mood?.....	6
<input type="checkbox"/> Are all behaviours helpful?.....	7
<input type="checkbox"/> How do I start to make changes?.....	8
<input type="checkbox"/> Step 1 – Recording current activities.....	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Step 2 – Reflecting on activity balance.....	12
<input type="checkbox"/> Step 3 – Planning my changes.....	16
<input type="checkbox"/> Step 4 – Making the changes.....	18
<input type="checkbox"/> Step 5 – Review and repeat.....	19
<input type="checkbox"/> Activity planner templates.....	20
<input type="checkbox"/> Notes.....	22
<input type="checkbox"/> Further resources.....	23
<input type="checkbox"/> Useful contacts.....	24



Work through the above and tick once completed.

Introduction

When we experience changes in bodily symptoms, we try to manage the best we can with the energy we have. The symptoms are real and difficult and can have a big impact on your life. Knowing how best to manage can also be a real challenge. This booklet has been created to help you manage some of the distress around living with these challenging symptoms.

How you might be coping

There are many ways that you might be coping with these difficult symptoms, by changing your activity, rest and sleep, including:

- Doing less of the things you enjoy. For example, you might have reduced your activities to just chores.
- You might worry about your symptoms and spend lots of time thinking about them (if this seems most relevant to you, ask your therapist for the workbook named 'worry management')
- Pushing through the symptoms as much as possible, and then 'crashing' (having to stop and recover) when the symptoms get worse.

It can be very difficult to get the balance right between activity and rest, and to make the most of the limited energy you have.

Balancing activity and rest

Pacing is a helpful strategy to help break this cycle. This is when we balance our activity (whether physical, mental, or emotional) with planned periods of rest.

Learning to pace can help you to manage your energy levels and symptoms, and help you move towards doing more things that are important to you (you may wish to look at other NHS Talking Therapies material on 'Values and Goals'). While finding this balance might sound like common sense, it is something that many of us can find difficult to do in practice...

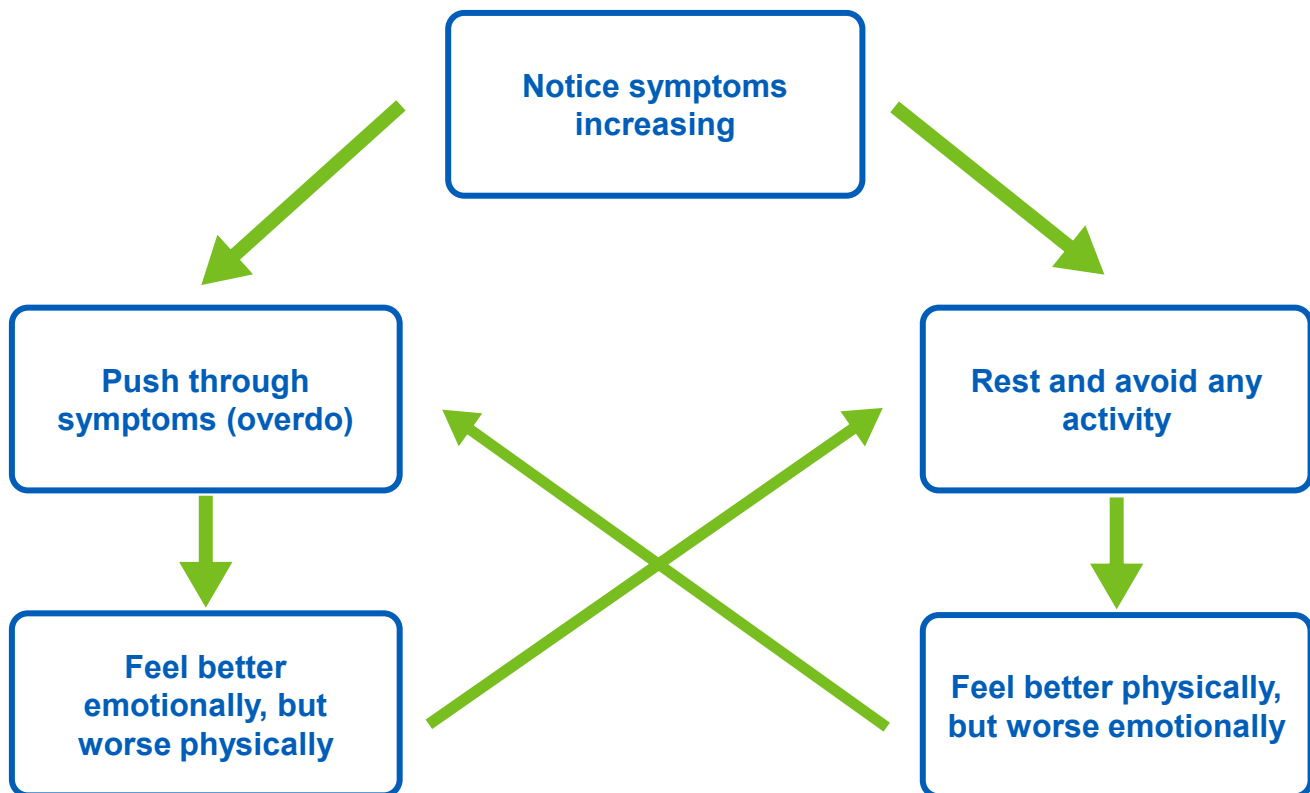
Continued next page...



The boom and bust cycle

Living with a long-term condition can feel very frustrating and distressing. It can create a cycle where you push yourself too hard to get things done, then feel worse physically. This might mean you then avoid an activity, which can make you feel even worse emotionally.

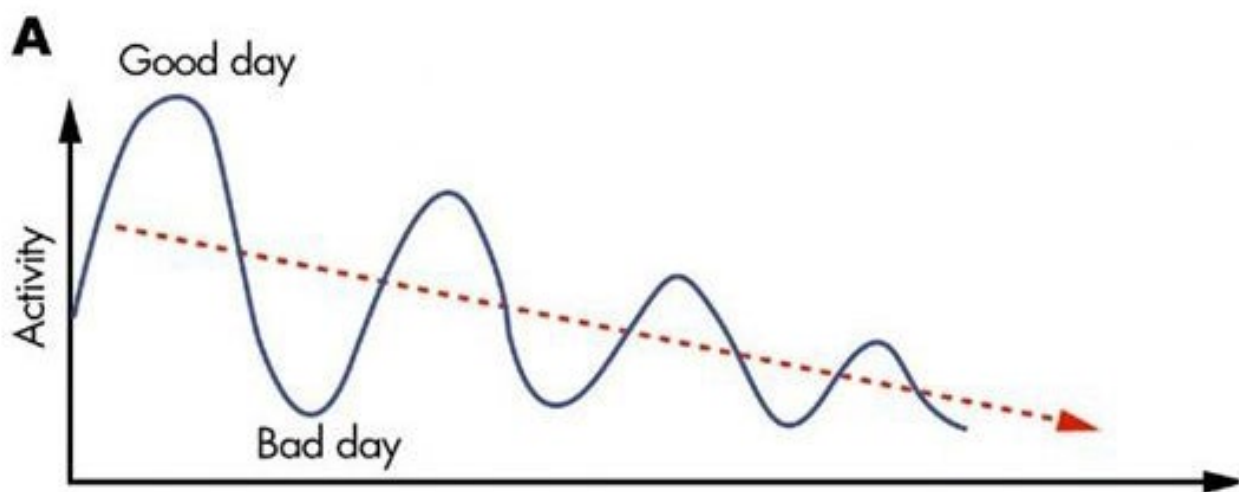
Then, to feel better, you might push yourself too hard again. It's a cycle that's hard to break, and it can make your symptoms feel unpredictable. This pattern is demonstrated in the diagram below:



Recognising this pattern can help you to find ways to balance your activity and rest, which can improve both your physical and emotional well-being. By pacing yourself and listening to your body, you can take small steps towards feeling better and breaking free from this cycle.

The boom and bust cycle

The more that this cycle is repeated, the more rest you need, and the more pressure you can feel to push yourself even harder to catch up. Getting caught in a vicious cycle of activity and rest is known as the “boom and bust” cycle. Although it might seem like common sense to push through when dealing with symptoms such as pain, fatigue and body aches - over time this can result in reduced overall activity levels.



When you are dealing with unpleasant symptoms, you might find yourself prioritising everyday tasks like laundry and cleaning, not having the time or energy for more enjoyable activities or socialising. However, focusing solely on chores can result in you missing out on activities that bring joy, such as our hobbies, or seeing friends, which can worsen our overall wellbeing and lead to low mood.

Read on to find out more about low mood, and how to break this cycle.

Reflect

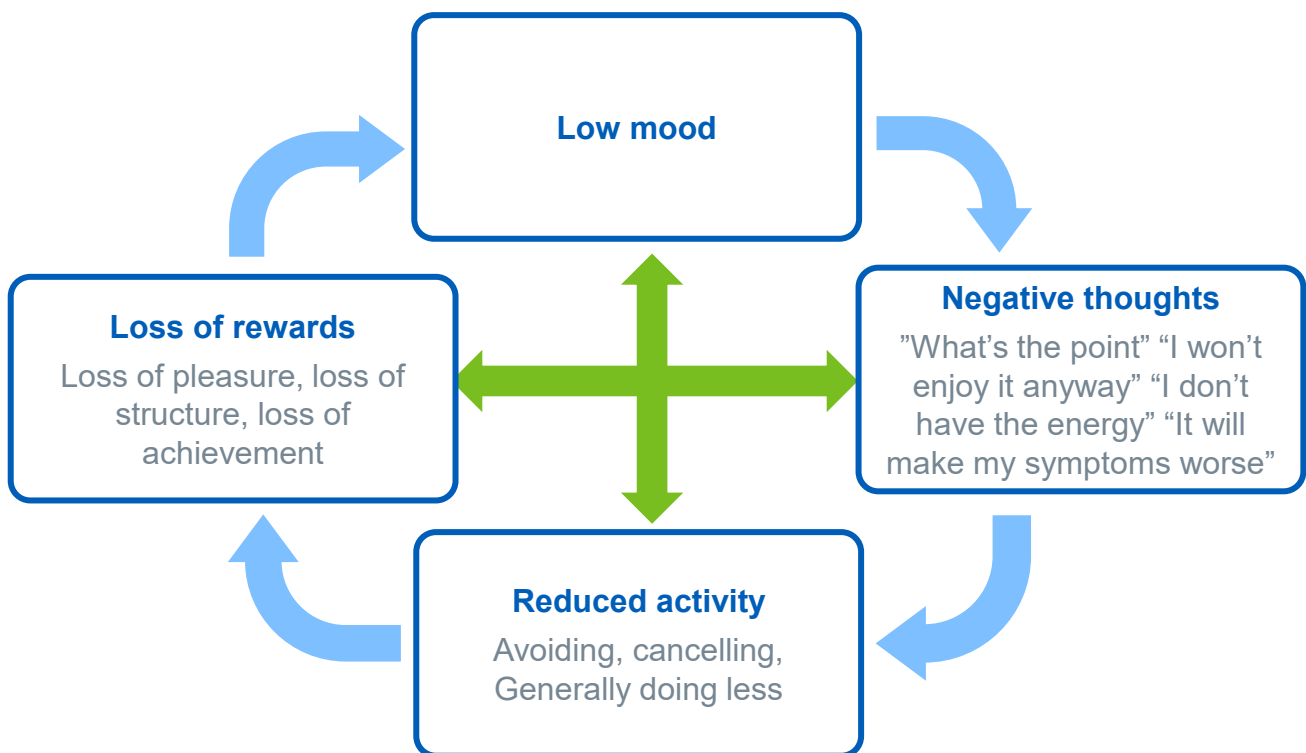
Consider what symptoms you notice and check in with yourself. How are you feeling? Do you recognise this cycle?

What is low mood?

Low mood and depression can present differently for everyone. Some common symptoms can include changes in sleep, appetite, mood, thoughts and motivation. Research shows that low mood is very common in people living with long-term health conditions.

Low mood cycle

Reduced activity caused by a health condition, as you can see in the cycle below, can mean that you miss out on feelings of achievement and enjoyment. The diagram below shows that when we feel down, we often find ourselves unknowingly stuck in this cycle which can sometimes reduce our activity to a point where we are avoiding or putting off important things in our lives. Reducing activity too much, or completely, leads to reduced fitness, which can worsen our health condition, with symptoms triggered with even less activity in the future.



Reflect

Consider what symptoms you notice and check in with yourself. How are you feeling? Do you recognise any of these symptoms?

Are all behaviours helpful?

Sometimes we can find that we not only stop engaging in behaviour or activities which can be helpful to us, but that we can also start doing things that may bring us some temporary relief but aren't helpful for us in the long-term.

Examples – do you recognise any of these?

- Withdrawing
- **Isolating** yourself from friends or family
- Using **alcohol or drugs** to distract from unpleasant thoughts or feelings
- **Neglecting** yourself (e.g. by eating or showering less)
- **Harming** yourself to cope with how you feel
- Excessive **spending**
- Seeking **reassurance** from those around you
- **Pushing yourself** towards unrealistic goals.
- **Stopping hobbies** and activities that bring you pleasure.

Reflect

What impact do these behaviours have in the long-term?

This booklet will focus on introducing behaviours that provide **a sense of achievement** and **pleasure**, **improving your mood** and helping you **replace any unhelpful behaviours** whilst living with pain, fatigue or body aches.



How do I start to make changes?

There are many different techniques we use in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) but when we want to make changes to low mood and motivation, the first most effective CBT tool we use is called **behavioural activation**.

What is behavioural activation?

Behavioural activation is based on the idea that our behaviour can have a big impact on our mood and how we feel physically.

We already know **(from the low mood cycle on page 6)** that when we are feeling low and experiencing negative thoughts, we do less, which means we miss out on opportunities to experience enjoyment and a sense of achievement. The aim of behavioural activation is to increase our activity level enough to give us the opportunity to enjoy things again, without overwhelming ourselves.

You may notice that you feel less motivated to do your usual activities when your mood is low. The way we change this is by trying **“action before motivation”**; the idea that sometimes we are not motivated to do something until we start. If we can break down an activity to reduce the **‘activation energy’** (i.e. how much effort it requires us to get started), we can make it easier to get started with a meaningful activity that could bring us pleasure, and further motivation.

Before you continue, it's important to recognise individual differences and limits of certain conditions. You shouldn't push through the limits of your symptoms.



How do I start to make changes?

Five steps

Over the next few pages, we will go through the five steps of behavioural activation:

- **Step 1 – Record my current activities and mood**
- **Step 2 – Reflect on my current mood and balance**
- **Step 3 – Plan changes**
- **Step 4 – Make changes**
- **Step 5 – Review**

Reflect

Think back to a time when you had to do something you didn't want to do but did it anyway. It might have been a chore in the house or meeting a friend for coffee, anything at all.

We tend to find the first steps of getting up and getting started are the hardest but once we've got started, we find we can continue. This is an example of "action before motivation".



Step 1. Record my current activities and mood

To be able to make changes it's important to understand what you are currently doing.

The first step is to use the worksheet on page 11 to record what you do over the next seven days and reflect on your mood after each part of the day. This is called a baseline diary. The mood rating is 0-10 where 10 is the best your mood could be and 0 is the worst. See the example below to get an idea of what a baseline diary might look like:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Morning	Woke up at 7am. Work by 9am. Difficult meetings x2	Woke up at 7.30am. Slept poorly. Had a shower and got dressed. Rushed to get to work.	Woke up at 8am, called off work. Stayed in bed until 10:30. Had breakfast at 11am.
Mood	4/10	3/10	2/10
Symptoms	Pain 6/10	Tiredness 7/10	Tiredness & Pain 9/10
Afternoon	Tidied kitchen over lunch break. Had late lunch at 3.30pm while working	Ate lunch at desk & worked through. Performance meeting with manager.	Watched films until 4pm. Skipped lunch and snacked as too tired to cook
Mood	3/10	5/10	2/10
Symptoms	Tiredness 6/10	Tiredness & Body aches 8/10	Tiredness 8/10
Evening	Finished work 5pm. Cooked dinner and washed up 6pm. Prep lunch for tomorrow. Worried about work meeting tomorrow.	Too tired to cook. Ate ready meal at 7pm. Watched a film and went to bed at 10.30pm.	Had an early dinner at 5pm. Got in to bed and watched TV from 6pm and went to sleep around midnight.
Mood	3/10	6/10	1/10
Symptoms	Pain 8/10. Tired 8/10	Tiredness 9/10	Tiredness 9/10
Comments	Felt low and worried all day. Pushed through symptoms to keep working.	Felt rushed and stressed all day. Upset by meeting with manager.	Worst day – didn't have energy to do much. Felt guilty for missing work, worried what others think

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Mood & Symptoms							
Afternoon							
Mood & Symptoms							
Evening							
Mood & Symptoms							
Comments							

Step 2. Reflecting on my balance of activities

The next step is to look at the week you've had and reflect on your balance of activities and any connections between activities and mood.

Often, when we begin to try to balance activity and rest, we will focus just on making sure we do any essential activities or chores. This can mean that we often stop doing things that we enjoy.

This step can help you to find a balance of activities, including:

- the general structure of the day (**routine activities**)
- the things we must do (**necessary activities**)
- and the things we do for enjoyment (**pleasurable activities**).

Often, coping with a health condition can cause our diary to become unbalanced, and it can be helpful to see what we could be missing across our day, or week.

Using your **completed baseline diary from page 11**, fill in the table on the next page by writing down which activities you did that were routine, necessary and pleasurable.

Once completed, take a moment to think about whether you had a balance in your activities over the past week. Ask yourself, did your symptoms stop you doing the things you enjoy? Did you prioritise necessary and routine over pleasurable activities?



Routine e.g. washing up, cleaning	Necessary e.g. paying bills, dealing with difficult situations	Pleasurable e.g. socialising, reading

Reflect

Which were your best days? What is different about these days? Does it feel like an even pace? Are there times when you push through and end up even more tired?

Introducing new activities

Now we have an understanding about what you are currently doing, it is important to start thinking about what activities you aren't currently doing as these will be the activities we will work on introducing over the coming weeks.

Use the below table to write down the activities you could begin to introduce into your week. It's important to make sure you stay within your current energy levels and follow guidance of your medical professionals.

Routine			
Necessary			
Pleasurable			



Tip

Need some inspiration?

See page 14 for some ideas if you're finding it hard to think of activities. Activities will be in different categories for different people and could feel nourishing or depleting depending on your current mood (e.g. walking the dog).

Example activities for your planner



Routine, necessary and pleasurable activities are different for everyone. For example, cooking for one person could be a pleasurable activity whereas for someone else it could be a routine chore.

See below a list of example activities you could add **into the table on page 13**.

Social	Creative	Recreational	Self-care	Educational
Visit a friend	Cook your favourite meal	Listen to music	Watch your favourite film	Visit the library
Call a family member	Do some DIY	Go for a walk	Have a relaxing bath/shower	Do a crossword
Invite someone round	Dance	Read a book	Visit the hairdresser	Visit a museum
Attend a local group	Paint a picture	Do some gardening	Set a goal	Learn a new language
Go out for dinner	Play an instrument	Watch a TV show	Wear your favourite outfit	Enrol on a course
Buy a gift for someone	Write a poem	Visit the cinema	Eat your favourite meal	Start reading a new book



Go with the flow

Try adding a 'flow task'; where you are completely absorbed and focused on the activity at a certain point, as well as deriving enjoyment from being engaged in that activity (like dancing, playing an instrument) and effortlessly not thinking about anything else.

Step 3. Planning my changes

Setting SMART goals

We can now start to plan the activities we would like to start introducing.

Use the **blank activity planner on page 16**, adding in the activities you identified in Step 2 on page 13.

Start with the activity you identified as the easiest in your list and start by trying to include two to three changes at most, planning them in your activity planner a week in advance and making sure you're working towards a balance.

It is important when planning your activity planner to make sure any activities you add are **SMART**:

- **Specific** What, when, where, with who?
- **Measurable** How will you know you have completed this activity?
- **Achievable** Is it beneficial given your symptoms?
Do you have all you need?
- **Realistic** Are you likely to manage this?
Is it possible with your current symptoms?
- **Time-focused** What time, what day, for how long?

Example: "Go for a walk" would become a SMART goal of: "At 2pm go for a 30-minute walk with the dog around the block twice".



Put your planner where you'll see it

When we write things down and place it somewhere prominent, it is much harder to ignore them. Once you've finished your activity planner, why not pop it on your fridge?



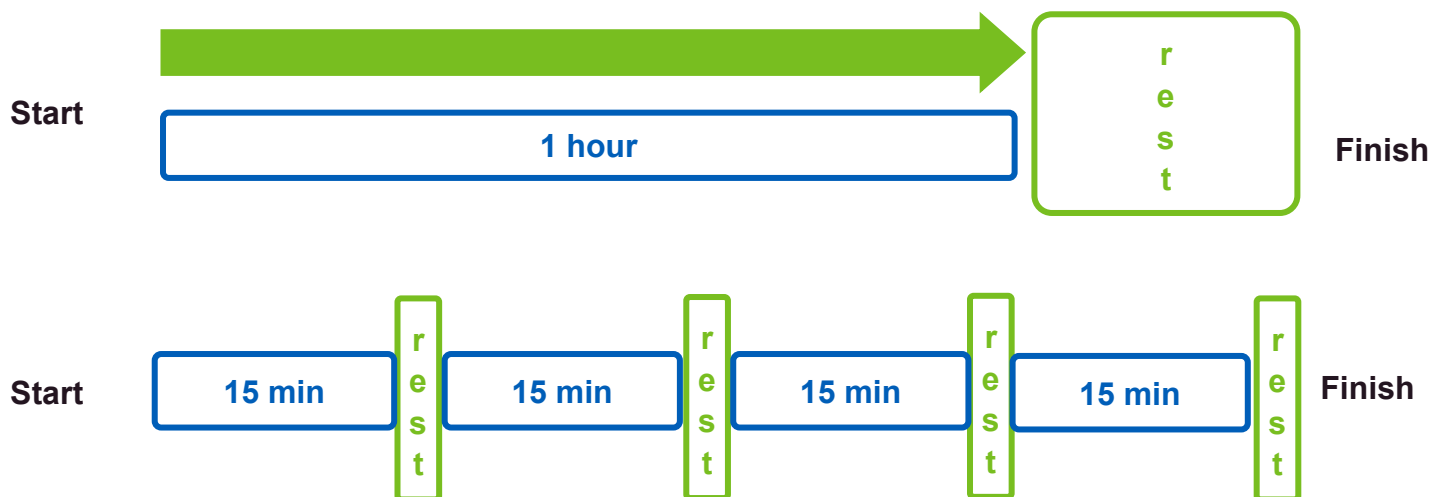
Pacing is key

When planning activities whilst living with an LTC, it's important to remember to pace your activities within your current energy levels

For example, if we are planning an activity which takes one hour to complete, it helps to break this up into smaller chunks with breaks.

By doing this, we find we have more energy at the end of the task than if we had pushed through without stopping. We get to feel pleased with completing the task, while also saving energy for things we enjoy doing.

Taking breaks in this way means remembering to take them before we physically 'need' to. You can organise breaks in a way that works for you - spacing them out evenly helps you to manage your energy.



Tip

Remind yourself to take a break

Using a mobile phone, or egg timer is a helpful way of making sure you take adequate breaks.

It's important to take breaks away from the activity or thoughts about the activity (i.e. don't check your emails!)



Step 4. Making the changes

Managing low motivation

Now that you have an activity plan, you can start to use ‘action before motivation’ to encouraging a minimum level of activity even when you aren’t feeling motivated. Keep track of your activities to make sure that you aren’t overdoing it or pushing through too much – it takes practice to get the balance right.

As you start to work through your activity plan, **use the diary** to record (as you did for the baseline diary), what you did and how you felt after completing each of the activities that you planned in.

Ask yourself some questions around when you notice difficult days occurring – is it following a particularly busy day? Are there patterns where you notice increased symptoms despite resting for several days?



Use the ‘5-minute rule’

If you’re putting something off or struggling to get started, whether that be getting up and having a shower, cleaning the kitchen, or going for a walk – say to yourself ‘I’m going to give this a go for 5 minutes’ to help make the task feel more manageable.

The first few minutes are always the hardest but once you get started, you’ll feel much better. Make sure you take breaks and keep within your current energy levels – it can be hard to stop once we get started!



Step 5. Review and plan further changes

The final step is to review how you found using the activity diary and add a balance of routine, necessary and pleasurable activities into your week.

There is as much to learn from the things that went well as there is from the things that didn't go so well – it is important to recognise both.



Using what you have learned you can go back to Step 2 [on page 12](#) and consider which activities you could plan into next week's activity planner, perhaps some of the activities you rated as medium difficulty.

Living with a long-term condition will usually have good days and bad days, but by managing our activities we can break out of the boom & bust cycle, allowing us to take control and do more of the things we want to do.

Continuing to do this week by week will help you to build on the positive changes you are making.



	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Mood & Symptoms							
Afternoon							
Mood & Symptoms							
Evening							
Mood & Symptoms							
Comments							

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Mood & Symptoms							
Afternoon							
Mood & Symptoms							
Evening							
Mood & Symptoms							
Comments							

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Mood & Symptoms							
Afternoon							
Mood & Symptoms							
Evening							
Mood & Symptoms							
Comments							

Notes

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Further resources



Workbooks

Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI) – <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

A range of detailed resources and PDF workbooks available to download for free focusing on a range of depression and anxiety related difficulties.

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS – <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>

Self-help guides free to download by PDF and print on a range of difficulties including anxiety and depression.

Smartphone apps (found on Apple and Google Play store)

WRAP – Wellness recovery action app

Mood Tools – Depression aid

Fear Tools – Anxiety kit

Insight Timer – Meditation app

Websites

Mind – <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Mental Health Foundation - <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

Useful contacts...



Talking Therapies:

0300 365 2000

(Open 8am to 8pm Monday to Thursday
8am to 5pm Friday)

Email:

talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk

Other contacts:

Berkshire Crisis Team:

0800 129 9999

(24 hours, specialist service for
immediate mental health crisis)

Samaritans:

116 123

(24 hours, confidential listening service)

NHS Direct / out of hours:

111

(24 hours, physical and mental
health concerns)

In an emergency always call 999

