

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter summary:

In this chapter we review:

- n What can influence mental well-being
- n Common mental health problems
- n How you can seek help
- n Possible treatments

## Mental well-being

Mental well-being is influenced by many factors, including childhood experience, life events, genetics, individual ability to cope and levels of social support. Other factors, like adequate housing, employment, financial security and access to appropriate health care can also affect our health.

Most people if put under sustained social, economic and psychological stress will experience symptoms of mental illness. The following can help to protect mental well-being for everyone, whether or not they have symptoms. They include:

- n keeping physically active
- n eating well
- n drinking in moderation
- n valuing yourself and others
- n talking about your feelings
- n keeping in touch with friends and loved ones
- n caring for others
- n getting involved and making a contribution
- n learning new skills
- n doing something creative
- n taking a break
- n asking for help.

## Mental health problems

Mental health problems can affect any person at any point in their life. Although at times many of us will experience, anxiety and depression for some people such feelings can be intense and prolonged. When this happens and we have difficulty coping with the demands of everyday life we need to seek help. The first point of help for most people will be our family doctor, who will be able to talk through what care and support is appropriate and make referrals for specialist treatment if needed. For the vast majority of people, care will be provided through their family doctor's

practice. Despite the large numbers of people who experience mental distress, mental illness is still much misunderstood and feared. The stigma experienced by people with mental health problems can be a barrier to seeking help. When we are mentally unwell, it is likely that we will feel vulnerable and it is essential that we get help and support as soon as possible or our health could deteriorate further.

## Common mental health problems include:

### Depression

Clinical or severe depression can result in feelings of despair, worthlessness and inability to feel positive about the future. People may find it difficult to concentrate or care about relationships, personal appearance or physical surroundings. Some people experiencing depression may consider harming themselves.

### Anxiety

People can experience chronic fear, tension and panic attacks. Severe anxiety can lead to sleepless nights, an inability to make simple decisions and physical symptoms of nausea, palpitations and shortness of breath.

### Schizophrenia

Doctors use this term to describe a state of mind that is affected by severe mental disorders that affect someone's mood, thinking and behaviour.

Symptoms can include:

- n Hallucinations, including hearing voices
- n Delusions about themselves or others.

### Psychosis

This term is used when a person cannot distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary.

### Manic depression or bi-polar disorder

People with this disorder will experience extreme mood swings

from intense elation to deep depression. For some these intense mood swings can take place over a short period of time while others will experience periods of highs and lows for longer periods of time.

### Eating disorders

The two main disorders are anorexia and bulimia. People who have anorexia deprive themselves of food often to the point of starvation. The person with the illness has an overwhelming need to control their body size and shape. People experiencing bulimia will binge on large quantities of food and then vomit or take laxatives to regain a sense of control.

### Phobias

Fear of particular situation or things such as spiders, rats, enclosed spaces or wide-open spaces. Phobias can lead to panic attacks, or the particular fear may dominate how a person lives their life - making it difficult to carry out everyday tasks.

### Obsessive compulsive disorder

People with OCD have a compulsion to carry out certain actions repeatedly. Examples include washing hands, counting, and putting items in a certain order. People become distressed if their routines are not followed.

### Dementia

Slowly advancing brain damage causes dementia. Symptoms include forgetfulness, confusion and anxiety.

Health problems can vary considerably and will not always fit into the descriptions we have listed.

## Help

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental distress it is important to talk to someone about your thoughts, feelings and experiences. For most people, their family doctor can offer help, advice and treatment. If you do not have a family doctor and need to register you can find a list of family doctors near to you on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). If you are having difficulty registering with a family doctor in Haringey then contact Enfield PCT on 020 8272 5500 and you will be sent a form to register with a Haringey family doctor.

Depending on your particular needs, it may be appropriate for a mental health professional to assess your needs and devise a care plan to help you with problems. Seeking help is always the first step to recovery and feeling better.

## Treatment

There are different methods of treatment for mental ill health. Medication may be appropriate, as may types of psychological therapy such as counselling, psychotherapy or self help groups. It may be beneficial to have a combination of medicine together with a psychological treatment.

Some people with mental health problems will need to take prescribed medication such as anti-depressants, which work by affecting the chemical balance in the brain. Family doctors and other medical staff will be able to explain the benefits of a particular drug, possible side-effects and the dose and length of time it will need to be taken. Rethink and the Manic Depression Fellowship run courses for people taking prescribed drugs to help manage medication. In addition, a guide to medication called 'Only the Best' is available from Rethink's website on [www.rethink.org.uk](http://www.rethink.org.uk)

Counselling or psychotherapy enables people to talk through their difficulties and examine issues and emotions. Counsellors can be accessed through doctors' surgeries, voluntary organisations or privately. Clinical psychologists work in the Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) and other specialist mental health services and can help with particular conditions.

This is where we hope this directory will be helpful. With the information that has been included we aim to point you to local and other resources that will help you to obtain the support you require.