



Royal Berkshire  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Prehab: Managing anxiety and low mood

Information for patients  
preparing for an operation or  
procedure

## Waiting for treatment

It is normal to feel overwhelmed and distressed while we are trying to cope with health issues and waiting for any treatments. Managing anxiety and low mood during this period is crucial, not just for your peace of mind, but also for ensuring a smoother treatment experience and recovery.

## How to identify anxiety

Physical symptoms	Mental symptoms
Faster, irregular heartbeat	Not being able to sleep
Dizziness	Difficult to concentrate
Chest pain	Feeling tense or nervous
Loss of appetite	Unable to relax
Feeling hot / sweating	Fearful thoughts
Stomach aches and pains	

## How to identify low mood and depression

Physical symptoms	Mental symptoms
Moving or speaking more slowly than usual	Feeling hopeless and helpless
Lack of energy	Having low self-esteem
Disturbed sleep	Feeling tearful
Poor appetite	Feeling irritable and intolerant of others
Avoiding social situations	No motivation or interest in things and no enjoyment in life

**If you experience anxiety, low mood or depression in the last two weeks or longer, talk to your GP about getting help.**

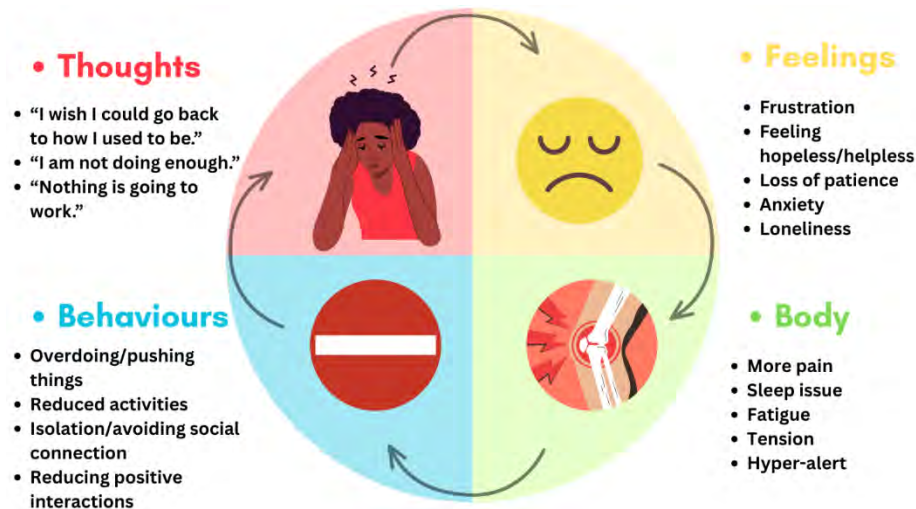
## How anxiety or low mood can impact our daily life

Sometimes, we don't realise we are experiencing symptoms of anxiety, low mood or depression until they affect our life, daily routines and behaviours. Often these changes make the symptoms worse and prevent us from getting better.

The 'vicious cycle' below shows how our thoughts, feelings and the way we behave can all be connected. When we lack motivation or energy to do exercise, it may not be because we are lazy; instead, we may be affected by this vicious cycle.

For example, when we have negative thoughts (e.g. "Nothing is going to work and what else can I do?", "Why me?"), we then feel frustrated, hopeless or even irritated. These feelings can make our bodies more sensitive to the pain and increase body tension. As a result, we become less and less active, avoid social connection, and stop engaging in our usual activities. When this happens, you may have been trapped in a vicious cycle.

However, there are things you can do to help you break this vicious cycle and manage your mental wellbeing a little better.




## Worry Tree Practice:

Non-stop worrying can be exhausting. To manage this, try setting aside some “worry time” each day. During this time, list your worries and try to find solutions for each one. When worries come up, tell them “Not now, I’ll think about you later”.


1. Set a worry time (better not 30 mins before bedtime)
2. During your worry time, try the **Worry Tree Practice**.

## The Worry Tree:


Notice the worry (write it down and put it away until worry time).



During worry time, ask yourself: is this worry under my control?  
Can I do something about it?



If your answer is NO, it means this is a hypothetical worry and since we can’t do anything about it, we should learn to let it go and refocus on the present. We can do some mindfulness practice and deep breathing to help with this.



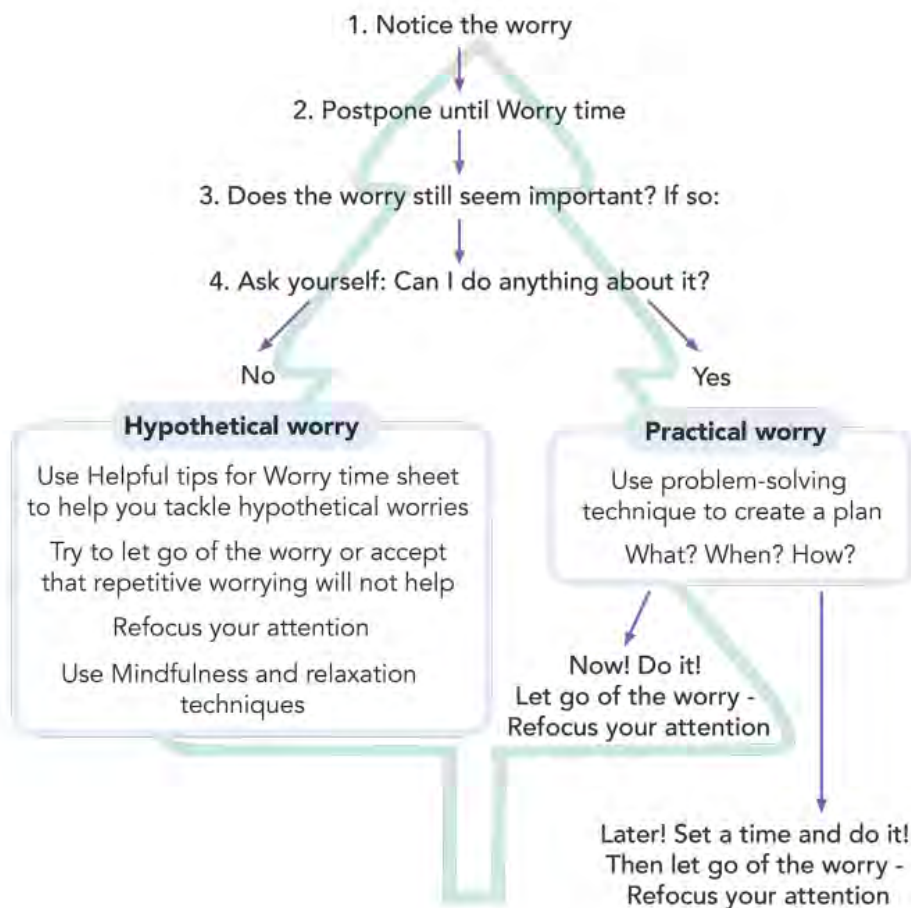
If your answer is YES, then it is a practical worry, and we can make a plan to tackle the worry.

## We can also follow the Worry Tree practice flowchart below from MindWell.

MindWell

[www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk](http://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk)

### The Worry tree



## Breathing exercise

There are many breathing and relaxation exercises you can do to relieve stress and relax your body and mind.

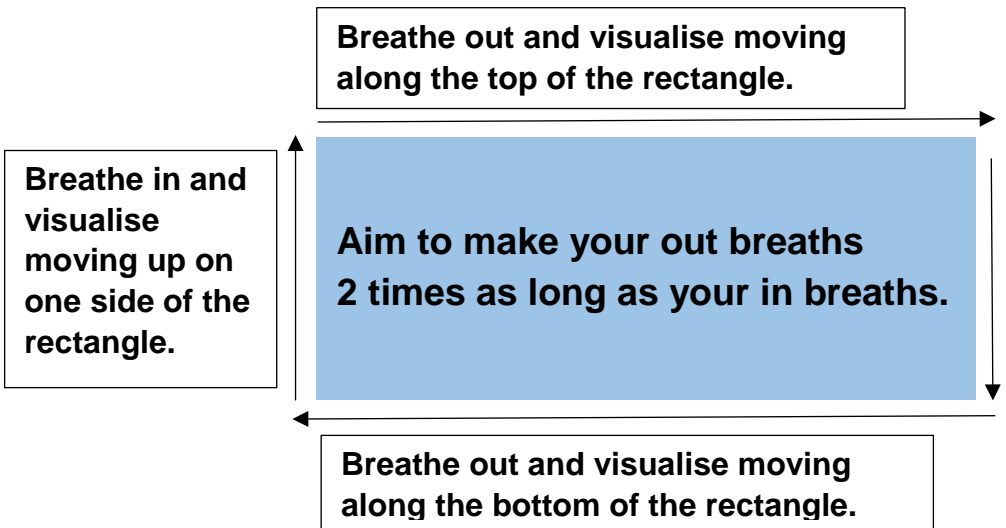
Over time, these exercises may become something you do automatically if you're tense or stressed. This can help you become more relaxed.

You will get the most benefit if you do breathing exercises regularly as part of your daily routine.

Choosing a breathing exercise that works for you is important. Here is one breathing exercise you can try.

### Rectangle breathing

Imagine a rectangle, or if available you can look at one in the room, e.g. a window or TV.



Repeat the exercise until you feel your breathing is under control. As you get used to using this technique, try breathing out for longer than you're breathing in.

## Useful links

For mental health helpline services in the UK, you can contact:

- **Mind:** Call InfoLine at 0300 123 3393 or text 86463. Email: info@mind.org.uk.
- **Samaritans:** Call 0330 094 5717. Samaritans are available for people of all ages and will listen to whatever is on your mind.
- **Shout:** Anyone in the UK can text 'Shout' to 85258 at any time of day or night to be connected to one of their trained, clinically-supervised volunteers. Shout provides 24/7, free, compassionate and confidential support over text message.

### **Five Steps to Mental Wellbeing – NHS**

This guide outlines five practical steps to improve your mental health and wellbeing, including connecting with others, staying active, and managing stress.

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>

### **Mental Wellbeing Tips – NHS Every Mind Matters**

A collection of simple, everyday tips to help boost your mental wellbeing and maintain a positive mindset.

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/>

### **Tackling Your Worries with CBT Techniques – NHS Every Mind Matters**

This page introduces self-help Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques to help manage and reduce worry and anxiety.

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/self-help-cbt-techniques/tackling-your-worries/>

## **Talking Therapies – Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

Talking Therapies is a free NHS service here to support the residents of Berkshire who may be struggling with difficulties including: low mood, anxiety and stress at this unprecedented time. They offer a range of treatments including 1:1 therapy and online support.

<https://talkingtherapies.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/getting-support/sign-up-to-talking-therapies/>

### **Contact information**

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Prehab Team

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To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Prehab Team, October 2025

Next review due: October 2027