

Help with mental health problems

Going to your GP

If you've got a mental health problem, go to your GP. You will often be able to get the support you need without having to see anyone else.

When GPs diagnose a mental health problem, they might suggest a number of things to help:

- you might be referred to a **community psychiatric nurse for counselling**, or support at home
- you might be prescribed **medication** like anti-depressants or tranquillisers. Don't be afraid to ask for information about these drugs, such as how they will help, how long you will have to take them, if they have any side effects and if there is any risk of you becoming addicted to them
- your GP might refer you to a specialist in a **community mental health team**, for example a **psychiatrist**, or recommend admission to hospital.

If your GP has **diagnosed** a particular problem, ask them to explain why. Also, ask them for information about the condition and whether there's a local **support group** for people who have it. Local support groups can often provide practical advice. If you don't agree with your GP's diagnosis, you can ask for a second opinion but your doctor could refuse to refer you if they think it's not necessary.

Medical records

Mental health is a sensitive subject and you might be worried about having details put on your medical records. If your GP doesn't prescribe any treatment, you can ask them not to record the problem in your medical notes. If details of the problem are put in your notes, ask to see them and check that the information is accurate. Your GP can refuse to show you the records, but only if they think it's not in your interests to see them.

No-one else, including members of your family, can see your medical records without your consent. However, in very serious cases, someone else might be appointed to deal with your affairs and they could see your records if the GP agrees, without your consent.

Social services

If you're having difficulty coping at home because of a mental health problem, you can contact your local social services department. You can also contact social services on behalf of someone else. Social services can provide community care services such as home helps, day care services, meals on wheels or care in a care home. They will assess what support you need and decide if you're entitled to any services. To find the contact details of social services, look under 'S' in your local phone directory.

Hospital

Some people with mental health problems will need to go into hospital. You can be admitted to a **psychiatric hospital** either with your consent or without your consent.

If you don't object to going into hospital, you'll be known as an **informal patient**. If you're admitted without your consent, you will be known as a **formal patient**. This is also known as being **sectioned** or **detained**. You might be able to **appeal** if you're admitted without your consent. The rules about people in hospital and their rights are complicated. To find out more, you could contact **Mind**, the National Association for Mental Health - see under Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Leaving hospital

You shouldn't be allowed to leave (**discharged**) from hospital unless there's been a full assessment of your health and social care needs. If you do need services, a care plan should be drawn up and agreed by you and your carers, your local council and your local Mental Health Trust. A special person called a **care co-ordinator** should be appointed to co-ordinate the care you will be given. If this doesn't happen, make a complaint - see under Further help at the end of this fact sheet for where to find information about making a complaint.

The police

If they believe you're suffering from a '**mental disorder**', the police can remove you from a public place to a place of safety. This would usually be a police station or sometimes it could be a hospital. The police can do this if they think that you need urgent care or control and that this is in the interests of your own protection or the protection of other people. You can be held at a police station or hospital for up to 72 hours, examined by a doctor and interviewed by a social worker. They may apply to get you admitted to hospital without your consent. If you're taken to a place of safety, you have the right to legal advice and to let someone know where you are.

Unfair treatment at work because of mental illness

It may be against the law to treat you unfairly at work because of a mental health problem. It may also be against the law if you're **harassed** at work because of your mental illness. An example is if your colleagues call you names or make jokes at your expense. Depending on the level of your mental health problem, this could count as **disability discrimination**. You can take action about disability discrimination, but you'll need expert advice first – see under Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

If you're having problems at work because of mental illness, talk to your union if you are a member. You may be able to make a formal complaint against your employer. This is called **taking out a grievance**. In some cases, you could go to an **employment tribunal** and may get **compensation**. You should raise a grievance first. There are **time limits** for going to an employment tribunal, so don't delay getting advice.

You can find more information about getting support in the workplace on the mental health campaign Time to change website at www.time-to-change.org.uk.

Unfair treatment outside work because of a mental health problem

It may be against the law to treat you unfairly because of a mental health problem when you are trying to get goods or services. Depending on the level of your illness, this could count as disability discrimination. Examples of services that must not discriminate against people with disabilities include services provided by hotels, banks, local authorities, advice agencies, pubs, theatres and shops. It doesn't matter whether the service is free or has to be paid for. However, there are exceptions to these rules. These include if the company or organisation can prove the unfair treatment is justified. If you feel you're being treated unfairly because of a mental health problem, get advice about what to do - see under Further help at the end of this fact sheet

Financial help

If you can't work because of your mental health problem, you might get financial help (**benefits**) like **Statutory Sick Pay, Income Support**, or **income-related Employment and Support Allowance**. You may also get **Disability Living Allowance**, or if you're 65 or over, you might get **Attendance Allowance**. Make sure you're getting all the financial help that you're entitled to. There are special rules about your benefits if you're in hospital for longer than a certain period.

Further help

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help you solve problems. To find your nearest CAB, including those that give advice by e-mail, click on [nearest CAB](#), or look under C in your phone book.

The National Association for Mental Health

The information line of The National Association for Mental Health (Mind) is 0300 123 3393. Their website is www.mind.org.uk. They can put you in touch with local support groups.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission

You can get guidance about disability discrimination from the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Their website is www.equalityhumanrights.com.

Directgov

There is a very useful government website at www.direct.gov.uk/disability. This has a lot of different information for people with disabilities, including people with mental health problems.

Other information on Adviceguide that might help

- Community care
- NHS Patients' rights
- NHS and local authority social services complaints
- Benefits for people who are sick or disabled
- Disability discrimination

This fact sheet is produced by [Citizens Advice](#), an operating name of The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as a full statement of the law. The information applies to England only.

This fact sheet was last updated on 20 May 2011. The content is checked regularly for any changes. If it is some time since you obtained this fact sheet, please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau to check if it is still correct. Or visit our website - www.adviceguide.org.uk - where you can download an up-to-date copy.