

CBT

Cognitive behavioural therapy

What is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)?

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapy for people seriously affected by mental illness. CBT involves a psychologist, doctor or other qualified health professional talking to the person about their symptoms, and working on alternative ways of thinking about and coping with them and their effects.

What are the aims of CBT for someone affected by a mental illness?

- To reduce the distress and disability connected with symptoms.
- To improve emotional stability.
- To improve the person's own ability to cope and deal with the effects of their illness.

How can CBT benefit someone who has a mental illness?

- It promotes understanding of how the person's own reactions play a part in how they experience and deal with symptoms of their illness. This understanding can be used to develop new ways of coping.
- It strengthens self-esteem and ways of dealing with feelings such as despair, shame or helplessness, which may result from experiencing mental illness.
- It encourages people to explore and test ways of improving their quality of life as far as possible: becoming more responsible for their own mental and physical health, learning to improve relationships, manage stress, and develop personal skills.

How long does CBT take to work?

It is usual to have a program of around twenty sessions of CBT over a period of up to six months. The interval between sessions will often be extended towards the end of the program.

What evidence is there that this kind of therapy works?

Research studies conducted at universities in Australia and overseas show CBT can be effective in helping people with depression, anxiety disorders and psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia.

Does this mean someone having CBT can stop taking their medication?

CBT is only one component of treatment. If medication has been prescribed, then it should only be stopped in consultation with the treating doctor. CBT does not cure mental illness, but helps people to cope better with its effects, and can help reduce the severity and frequency of further episodes of illness.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have.

SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness.

For more information about this topic see:

- *The SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments*
Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.

To order visit the SANE Bookshop at www.sane.org or call 03 9682 5933