

## Condition:



# Self-harm

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## What are Self-harm?

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or over whelming situations and experiences.

After self-harming you may feel a short sense of release, but the cause of your distress is unlikely to have gone away.

Self-harm can also bring up very difficult emotions and could at times make you feel worse too.

There are different ways in which self-harming can happen:

- Cutting
- Poisoning
- Over or under eating
- Biting yourself
- Picking or scratching at your skin
- Burning your skin
- Hitting yourself or the walls
- Overdosing on medication
- Excessive exercise
- Pulling your hair
- Getting into fights more often
- Self-neglect

Self-harm is linked to other mental health issues in some cases and can affect anyone at any age. Those that self-harm are at a higher risk of suicide but you might not want to end your life.

## Self-harm and work

Your current or past self-harm might be evident to others in the workplace or may be hidden but think about disclosing the issues to those you work with – this allows a positive conversation to occur and support to be put in place. Many people who do or have self-harmed work in most workplaces so this should not be seen as a barrier to any job.

### Top Tips to help manage your self-harm behaviour in the workplace

- **Tell someone at work you trust about your condition.** Knowing that someone knows that you self-harm can be comforting and can help to reduce any anxiety you have about someone finding out at a later stage.
- **Improve your self-esteem and confidence.** Take on tasks that help you to demonstrate what you are capable of. Seek useful feedback from others in the workplace on your performance.
- **Manage your stress at work.** Take your breaks; Allow yourself plenty of time in the evenings to unwind; Make sure you get to bed early enough and get enough sleep; Allow time at the weekend for rest and relaxation; Don't take work home with you (unless you really have to). Don't check your work e-mail or voice mail after hours.
- **Make to-do lists and prioritise workloads.** Good time management will allow you to schedule enough time to complete each task without feeling under pressure or stressed.

- **Be realistic about what you can achieve.** Don't over commit or offer to take on additional work if you don't have enough time and don't be afraid to tell your line manager that you have too much on. They may not know how you are feeling.
- **Ask for help.** If you're feeling overwhelmed, ask a colleague for help – this may prevent an incident.
- **Take regular breaks away from your desk.** A walk around the block or a few minutes of deep breathing can help clear your head.
- **Ask for reasonable adjustments.** Such as working in a different area or with a different team if these trigger your stress.
- **Take advantage of employer resources and benefits.** Your workplace may offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which can offer free confidential counselling or other support. Find out what's available to you.

## Self-harm and me

### Some of the symptoms of self-harming can be:

- Scars, from burns or cuts
- Fresh cuts, scratches or other wounds
- Bruises
- Hair loss or bald spots
- Broken bones
- Keeping sharp objects to hand
- Wearing long sleeves or long trousers even in hot weather
- Claiming to have frequent accidents or mishaps
- Forms of self injury
- Use of alcohol and/or drugs

## What might cause me to self-harm?

Some people have described self-harm as a way to :

- Express something that is hard for them to put into words.
- Turn invisible thoughts or feelings into something visible.
- Change emotional pain into physical pain.
- Reduce overwhelming emotional feelings and thoughts.
- Have a sense of being in control.
- Escape traumatic memories.
- Have something in their life that they can rely on.
- Punish yourself for your feelings and experiences.
- Stop feeling numb, disconnected or dissociated.
- Create a reason to physically care for yourself.
- Express suicidal feelings and thoughts without take your own life.

These all could be because of any difficult experience which can cause you to self-harm, some of the common reasons can be:



# Talking to your GP or other health professionals about self-harm

Self-harm is not something that is diagnosed by any health professional.

If you are self-harming then it is recommended that you visit your GP who will make a referral to specialist support services like the community mental health team in order to complete an assessment and provide the best support/care for you.

## Treatment that might help with self-harm

GP	Talking Therapies	Support Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GP will be able to prescribe medication for anxiety or depression.</li> <li>• Make a referral to the Community mental health team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can see a therapist to discuss your thoughts and feelings, and how these are affecting your behaviour and wellbeing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These can be peer led groups where you can share your story and journey with others who have experienced similar things too.</li> </ul>
Online Support	Scar Treatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National self harm network online allows you to speak with others online without sharing whom you are.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scars for some can be an important part of their journey.</li> <li>• For help with scar treatment can be found on Lifesigns website.</li> </ul>	

## Self-management and caring for yourself

A key to self-management of self-harm is to understanding your own patterns. These can help you to establish what gives you the urge to self-harm and to recognise the urge. This will enable you to better understand the next time you have those similar feelings.



### Learn to recognise your triggers

Triggers are what give you the urge to hurt yourself. Note down what was happening just before you self-harmed too. Did you have any particular thoughts? Did a situation, person or objects remind you of something difficult?



### Become aware of the urge to self-harm

These can be physical sensation for example - racing heart or feeling of heaviness; strong emotions like sadness/anger; disconnection from yourself or loss of sensation, repetitive thoughts, unhealthy decisions or working too hard to avoid feelings.



### Identify distractions

Distracting yourself is a way of giving you some time and reducing the intensity of the urge to self-harm.



### Take notice

Be mindful. Mindfulness is a practice on focusing on what is happening "now" and is helpful when you have thoughts or feelings of self-harming. Mindfulness helps us ask "Is this constant replaying the thought over and over in my head helpful, or is it simply making me feel bad". It stops "mental events" taking control and can reduce the urge to self-harm.



## Give back

Doing something nice for someone will make you feel better about yourself.

Try committing an act of kindness once a week- make your colleague a cup of tea, give someone a compliment or ask someone how they are feeling.



## Be active

Doing exercise helps release special chemicals in the brain called endorphins which make us feel better. Doing exercise doesn't need to mean going to the gym, or going for a run, you don't even need a pair of trainers. It can be anything that gets your body moving. This could be a walk round the block, taking the stairs at work or getting off the bus a stop early.



## Connect. Reduce social isolation

Rather than sending someone an email, visit their desk, talk to them. Speak to someone in the office you haven't spoken to before. Relationships are so important for promoting wellbeing and making you feel good.



## Keep learning. New hobbies

This can help to distract you from your urge to self-harm and to meet new people. It boosts self-confidence and makes us feel better.

## Useful links

## Helplines

**SAMARITANS**

116 123 (24hrs)  
jo@samaritans.org



0300 123 3393

Young minds  
parents helpline

**0808 802 5544**  
**(9.30am-4pm**  
**weekdays)**