

Content warning – the following resource covers elements of when physical activity can become unhealthy. We will be touching on topics including eating problems and over-exercise/exercise addiction. If you find any of the content triggering, we encourage you to reach out to Mind's Infoline on **0300 123 3393** or Samaritans on **116 123** for immediate support if you need it or see mind.org.uk for further information.



Is your relationship with physical activity becoming unhealthy?

We know physical activity can be an amazing way to support our mental health and help us feel good. But it isn't helpful for everyone all the time, and can lead to problems for some of us. It's important to recognise some of us can develop an unhealthy relationship with exercise.

Some signs that physical activity may be becoming unhealthy include:

- exercise is affecting your job or relationships
- you can't stop exercising without feeling worried or distressed
- you don't take breaks when feeling tired, injured or unwell
- you're exercising hard every day, or several times a day
- you're making excuses to be active
- you no longer enjoy exercise, or it has started to feel like a chore
- you feel that physical activity is the most important thing in your life and defines who you are.

Any of these could be a sign you have, or are developing, an unhealthy relationship with exercise.

Are you moving because you want to, or because you feel you have to?

Over-exercising and exercise addiction are on a spectrum. This isn't about defining people, but ensuring you receive the support you need.

Over-exercising

This can mean exercising for too long or too intensely, without enough rest for your personal limits.

Exercise Addiction

This can mean feeling unable to stop or not feeling in control of how much you exercise.

Over-exercising can be a form of self-harm. Exercising beyond your limits can cause both physical and emotional harm. It might start to be a way for you to avoid difficult emotions instead of getting support too.

How to help yourself

1 Check-in with how you're feeling

Are you moving because you want to? Or because you feel you have to?

2 Try to take rest days

Rest is personal. Some of us might find it difficult to start with, but it can help your body and mind to recover.

3 Try to avoid setting goals based around your weight or shape

Be kind to yourself. Not every day will lead to a personal best, and that's OK.

4 Aim for balance

Be mindful of the exercise you do. It might help to keep an activity diary to ensure you're getting the right mix.

5 Connect with others

Outside of physical activity and do things that you enjoy that aren't exercise.

Where to get support

Helplines:

Speak to your [local Mind or mental health organisation](#)

Call Samaritans on **116 123**

Call Mind's Infoline on **0300 123 3393**

Text Shout to **85258**

Call [BEAT](#) (if you're experiencing an eating problem) on **0808 801 0677**

Resources:

[Information on the relationship between physical activity and mental health.](#) This includes guidance on developing a healthy relationship with physical activity, signs, symptoms and signposting to support.

Mind's information on [seeking help for a mental health problem.](#)