

How Do I Recover?

Start with the basics; make a commitment to nurture yourself for a while. Spend the next couple of weeks making sure you've got all the nutrients you need to be resilient to stress.

Another way to speed your recovery is to link in with your communities. Research shows us that people who have social support networks and resources (and actually use them) tend to have better mental health than people who do not.

We are social beings; in the cave-man days of our evolution, survival depended upon our ability to be part of a group and we are still 'wired' that way. Social connection is a crucial part of wellness, when we don't have it our minds automatically fall into survival mode when we encounter stress and this puts us at risk of a whole host of difficulties. So get connected.

There are heaps of people out there whose job it is to help you. Support workers can help with goals and navigating the system. Therapists can help with addressing underlying causes. Medical doctors can help with physical health and referrals. Psychiatrists can help with medication and referrals. And your community is full of recovery resources if you think creatively.

As you become more and more skilled at effective communication, balanced thinking, pro-active problem-solving, accessing support and repairing your moods, you will experience more and more wellness and less and less unwellness. The most important thing to remember is that you will get through it and you will grow from it.

You can find more information about recovery and resources to help you on your journey at the Engage Aotearoa website at www.engagenz.co.nz

This print brochure is available as a free digital download from the Engage Aotearoa website. You can also view this brochure as an A4 Information Pack for on-screen reading.

Other Engage Aotearoa Information Packs

- Understanding Treatment Providers
- Understanding Treatment Approaches
- Overcoming Anxiety
- What is Recovery?
- Understanding the Role of Biology
- Supporting Recovery
- Online Resources
- Coping for Recovery
- Recovery with CBT

More Recovery Tools Live at www.engagenz.co.nz

The Coping Kete: find a new strategy online every week or have them delivered to your inbox.

The Community Resources Directory: download your own copy of the only regularly updated national directory of community recovery resources.

The Butterfly Diaries: Talented NZ writers tell the recovery stories of real people who have made it through the experience of being suicidal. Read story samples online.

Engage Groups and Workshops: Engage Group is a free education and support programme for people with anxiety. Engage Workshops are one-off workshops that build practical skills and understanding for the recovery journey.

...and The Mental-Health News and Events Blog

Engage Aotearoa is a CMHRT project to make it easy for Kiwis to find what they need to recover. Resources were created by Engage Aotearoa Ltd and gifted to CMHRT so they can be freely available for all who need them.



What is Mental Illness?

Mental-health problems are labels for complex responses to the world that keep us stuck in distressing or unhelpful experiences.

Mental illness is the popular term used to talk about mental-health problems. Mental-health problems are just as serious as physical illnesses but they are not as easy to understand.

Mental-health problems are 'bio-psycho-social' conditions. This means they involve our bodies, minds and situations. They are not permanent states that require lifelong treatment. We can move between wellness and unwellness several times a day as our situations, behaviours, physical states and ways of thinking shift and change.

Often part of the problem is that we are doing the same things too often, and it gets us caught in one kind of experience.

This could happen to anyone. Human beings are complex and holistic entities; our wellness is affected by all of the physical, mental and social aspects of living in and responding to the world. And the world is not easy.

Mental-health problems are not brain disorders

A brain disorder is:

Parkinson's disease: when brains stop processing dopamine properly.

Huntington's disease: when people have a gene that causes mutations in areas of the brain.

Sometimes mental-health problems can happen following a head injury or physical illness; our brains and bodies are a crucial part of the wellness mix.

Experience of head injury, brain disorders and physical illness can lead to experience of mental-health problems. But so can the experience of loss, prolonged work stress, trauma, childhood distress, neglect, bullying, ostracism and any number of other accidents, mistakes and acts of nature that impact on the way we see and interact with the world.

A mental-health problem is:

Depression

Generalised Anxiety Disorder

Bipolar Disorder

Schizophrenia spectrum disorders

Panic Disorder

Borderline Personality Disorder...

These are all labels that have been created by the American Psychiatric Association in their diagnostic manual, the DSM.

These labels describe different clusters of troubling or unwanted experiences that reliably occur together often. These experiences can be caused by many different things and there is no single cause that is the same for all people, even if they have the same diagnosis.

Our Brains Are Processors

What is happening in our brains often says just as much about what is happening around us and **what that means to us** as it does about how healthy our brain is.

It is also true that the way we act and think affects our neuro-chemistry. Some behaviours and ways of thinking hold us in the same mood states for a long time and sensitise those response pathways in our brains. It can become difficult to change these response pathways by ourselves; not only do we need to change the powerful habits that have shaped our reality and the situations that set them up in the first place, but we've got to deal with these physical 'hair-triggers' too.

This is why some people find that medications can be helpful for a while; they can work to balance out the physical responses and allow you to work on the thinking patterns and behaviour.

Many people recover from mental-health problems by accessing non-medical forms of treatment and support. Talking therapies like CBT, DBT and ACT have been shown to be effective treatments for most mental-health problems.

A lot of people also find that exercise and nutrition play a key role; a great deal of research suggests exercise may be as effective as antidepressants!

If you can change the input you are giving your brain, you can change the way it responds to things and change your mental-health experiences.

No matter what, it is possible to learn new ways of being and start strengthening some new response pathways for yourself.

What Does a Diagnosis Mean?

If you have received a diagnosis and it is correct, it means that you experience a certain cluster of behaviours, thinking styles and feelings that disrupt your ability to live well and cause you to become stuck in some unhelpful and often pretty distressing experiences.

These unhelpful experiences may be described as mania, hearing voices, depression, feeling hopeless, loss of pleasure, difficulty concentrating, intensified emotions, delusions, paranoia or panic attacks.

Every diagnosis has differences and each person experiences it in their own way, but there are many commonalities too.

In each case there are situations, behaviours and ways of thinking that help set up the experience and keep it going. These could be learned responses to difficult things that have happened, either recently or in the past. A lot of people with mental-health problems have been through trauma in their lives, but this isn't true for everyone.

A diagnosis doesn't say anything about what might be causing the problem. They just describe what the symptoms of it are. No matter what the mental-health problem is, we are ALL people responding to our worlds.

Nearly half of the population will go through a mental-health problem in their lifetimes. So it is a completely normal thing to face as part of being human in this world. A mental disorder diagnosis is nothing to be ashamed of. A diagnosis is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign that we are struggling in our response to something and could do with some help.