Relapse Prevention Pack

NPS' Relapse Prevention Pack has been supported by Pfizer Limited
Relapse prevention kits exist for other mental health conditions (e.g. bipolar disorder) but to the knowledge of the NPS they are not freely available for other mental health problems, particularly anxiety disorders. This booklet aims to address this.
Introduction

The National Phobics Society (NPS) is a registered charity which supports those affected by anxiety disorders by raising awareness of the various conditions and promoting rehabilitation. We believe that those experiencing anxiety disorders are best placed to support others with similar conditions. We are able to provide a wide range of information and supportive services along with low cost, high quality therapy services. Our services are supported by a high profile advisory panel which offers advice and expertise as required.

We are able to support individuals with the following conditions:

- Agoraphobia
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and associated conditions
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Panic Attacks and Panic Disorder
- Social Phobia/Social Anxiety Disorder
- Specific Phobias
- Other anxiety related conditions e.g. Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

The NPS also provides information and services to professional healthcare workers (GPs, psychologists, psychiatrists etc) working or interested in the area of anxiety disorders.

The NPS has become increasingly aware of a demand through our members and callers to the helpline, of the need for a package of information on relapse prevention issues for those living with / affected by anxiety disorders. This tends to be an area where we feel members need the most support as often, when traditional forms of support are withdrawn, the individual is left to manage their anxiety alone.
What is a relapse?

Relapse is the term used to describe an increase in unhelpful thinking and behaviours after a period of feeling improved or after experiencing better mental health. A relapse can involve difficulties coping with day to day activities, increased anxiety, increased symptoms of panic or increased negative thoughts.

What is relapse prevention?

Relapse prevention is the term used to describe a way of identifying unhelpful thinking and behaviours and reducing them with the aim of promoting positive behaviours, thoughts and feelings which may prevent ill health (both physical and emotional) from recurring. This pack is designed to assist you in developing your own relapse prevention strategy. It will help to reinforce the things that you do to maintain your emotional and physical wellbeing.

Over a period of time, hopefully you have seen some improvement in the way you feel with regard to your anxiety and you are now feeling more in control of your thoughts and/or behaviours. In order to get to this point, you must have changed a part of the way that you think or behave, whether you realise it or not.

This pack will help you to identify what you have done that has made a difference to the way you feel and what you can do to maintain that change.

It is useful to note that individuals also suffer lapses as well as relapses. A lapse is different from a relapse in that it could be a small slip in behaviour or thought which is recognised and challenged. For example, a single negative thought does not mean that you will enter back into the anxiety cycle and experience prolonged and worsening symptoms. It also does not necessarily mean that you will suffer a full blown relapse; lapses are very common and will typically pass with time.

By becoming aware of our triggers and other warning signs, utilising the various recovery tools available to us and by having a practical plan of action, we can minimise the tendency to lapse back into our previous behaviours or thoughts, if/when lapses happen. Learn what you can from the situation then move on.

**REMEMBER:** you have already proved that you can make a change in how you feel. Therefore, you can keep it up!
What can cause a relapse?

‘I split up with my girlfriend and as a result started to think very negatively about myself which led to the same feelings of panic and anxiety that I had felt before’.

A relapse can occur for various reasons, including specific events, objects or thoughts that could lead to an increase in anxiety, panic or negative thinking. These situations are often called triggers because they trigger an onset of symptoms. While people with similar disorders may share similar triggers, they may also find that their triggers are highly individual. As some triggers will occur without conscious awareness (i.e. we don’t know that they are happening), it is possible that an individual may not be aware of all of their triggers. By being more aware of how you react to individuals, situations and events, you will be able to expand your list of triggers.

Some triggers for relapse are listed below:

- Stressful life events (e.g. marriage, divorce, moving house etc)
- Stopping or changing medication
- Physical ill health
- Conclusion of therapy
- Change in circumstances

These life events can be large or small and may occur either alone or in conjunction with other events. What one person may find is a trigger, another person may not. By identifying your triggers, you may find that you are able to prepare yourself to manage them more effectively as they arrive in your life.

Think about what your personal triggers may be. Try to note down these triggers so that you are aware of what may lead to a relapse.

E.g. My anxiety triggers are: arguments with a partner, feeling physically ill, stress at work.
Identifying what has changed

‘By thinking back on how I had felt before and how things had been and comparing them to what was going on now, I was able to see a huge difference’.

It is often very hard to see what has changed as we can be unaware of change as it happens. It is only when we look back and compare how we were then, to how we are now that we can see huge differences!!

Think back to how you were **before** you felt the way you do now. What was different?

Look at what progress you have made. What has improved?

Areas to focus on:

1. What are the changes / differences in the way I think?
2. What are the changes / differences in the way I feel?
3. What are the changes / differences in the way I act?
4. What are the changes / differences in the way I handle practical situations, relationships and the problems I face?

By considering this information, it highlights what has changed. By asking yourself certain questions around these areas, you can identify the changes that you need to keep in place.

The following points may be useful to consider:

1. What did I do to make this change in my thinking?
2. What did I do to make this change in my actions?
3. How can I apply these changes in the future?
4. What new skills have I gained that could help me in the future?
5. How can I continue to use what I have learned in my everyday life?

Prevention of anxiety and associated conditions may focus on you viewing your thoughts as changeable rather than as facts about self or reality. Learning to identify bodily sensations that accompany maladaptive (unhelpful) thoughts is also important in helping to prevent anxiety.

*For example, if you have a headache, previously you may have interpreted this as a symptom of a physical condition, whereas now, you may recognise that it could be caused by the anxiety that you are experiencing.*
Identifying barriers

‘By continuing to talk with people who responded negatively to my anxiety I found that I felt worse about myself which would make me feel very anxious. When I stopped spending time with them I found that it was far easier to stay positive and feel good’.

Now that you have identified the actions, thoughts and behaviours that have helped you to make these changes, it may help you to identify things that would prevent you from continuing with them. These are known as barriers or obstacles.

People affected by anxiety disorders often engage in self-defeating, negative thought patterns which frequently occur automatically (i.e. without the person concerned being aware). These thought patterns will affect an individual’s behaviour, resulting in unproductive or negative consequences.

The negative consequences are then seen by the individual as proof that the negative thoughts are correct. Their thought/behaviour patterns will lead to a repetitive cycle with negative thoughts leading to negative behaviours. The consequence of this is that further negative behaviour will encourage more self-defeating thoughts. This cycle then becomes extremely hard to break as it becomes a routine way of responding, occurring without much / any awareness.

To identify your personal barriers, consider the following:

1. What behaviours do you carry out that are unhelpful?
2. What thoughts are you thinking that could be unhelpful?
3. What practical factors could be unhelpful?
4. Which people are unhelpful?

For example:

When I feel unwell, I begin to avoid certain situations although I know it would help me to face them.

When I start to feel unwell, I think I can’t manage my anxiety which makes me feel worse.

Setting myself unrealistic goals means I often set myself up to fail.

Talking with individuals who don’t understand anxiety and who tell me to ‘pull myself together’ often makes me feel worse.
‘By thinking long and hard about how I felt when I was at my most anxious and by asking others about the way I had acted, I was able to pinpoint what my warning signs were’

People often say they don’t realise that they are getting ill until it is too late. This is not the case - you just need to know what to look for!

Even if you are able to recognise your triggers, you may still experience a relapse. It will be helpful if you are able to recognise the signs of a relapse.

**Common signs include:**

**Altered Sleeping Patterns**

Recognising if you are experiencing difficulties in sleeping can often be a key aspect in identifying problems with managing your anxiety. Getting less sleep, waking up in the night and difficulty rising in the morning may be warning signs of a relapse. Similarly, having a larger focus on how much sleep you are getting can also be a red flag. This is because when we are anxious, we tend to focus on how much sleep we think we ‘should’ be having rather than what we need. You may also find that you associate a bad night’s sleep with a relapse rather than putting it down to just a bad night. This way of thinking can lead us into a downward spiral of attributing symptoms to anxiety when they may actually be caused by other events.

**Changes in mood (altered feelings)**

Experiencing low mood, increased anxiety and feelings of panic are often an indication that a relapse may be occurring. Lack of motivation and an increase in negative thought patterns can also be associated with a change in mood. This change in mood can either be linked to a specific event or to no particular trigger.

**Changes in behaviour (altered behaviour / reduced activity / unhelpful activities)**

This could relate to behaving in a specific way which is associated with the anxiety, e.g. checking behaviours, asking for reassurance etc. You may also feel that you are beginning to avoid feared situations or are withdrawing from social contact with other people.
Avoidance

One of the easiest coping mechanisms for anxiety is to avoid it all together. This often means avoiding situations, events and people that make us anxious. However, this is not always the best strategy for managing anxiety! Avoidance is a short-term solution as it makes us feel less anxious as we are not entering the feared situation. However, it tells our mind and our body that we need to avoid situations because they are dangerous. This reinforces anxiety and makes us feel that we need to avoid the situation, person or event again in the future. If we were to face our anxiety, we would probably find that each time we did, it would get easier and the anxiety would reduce. Rather than avoiding a situation, person or event - try to face it and do the opposite to what the anxiety is telling you to do! This is a much better, long-term solution and will reduce the anxiety in the long run.

E.g. When I feel unwell, I avoid socialising. This makes me feel less anxious in the short term, however, it makes me more anxious in the long term as when I encounter a social situation again, I feel worse. When I am feeling well, although I still feel anxious, I involve myself in social situations and the more that I practice socialising, the better I feel.

Changes in how you think (altered thinking)

Changes in how you are thinking could include: an increase in negative thought patterns - pre-empting a relapse (e.g. I know that I will get unwell again), obsessive thoughts, an increase in fight or flight type thoughts (e.g. wanting to run away from the feared situation or becoming defensive), thinking more irrationally etc.

Changes in physical symptoms

Feelings that the physical symptoms of anxiety are increasing and that you are unable to cope with managing them. You begin to believe that ‘normal’ physical symptoms indicate a deterioration in mental health. Changes in appetite (either increased or decreased) can also be indications of a relapse.

Increased irritability

When we become anxious, we may also become more irritable. A change in your temperament may also be an indication of a relapse.

Lack of concentration

You may find it a struggle to concentrate on even the simplest tasks. For example, you may have wandering thought patterns and can often be left feeling totally distracted. An inability to concentrate is a symptom of anxiety and is often described by sufferers as a ‘racing mind’.

You may like to involve others in identifying your warning flags. For example, is there a particular behaviour you exhibit when you are feeling more anxious? Do you say particular things when you are becoming anxious? What would others identify as your signs of a relapse? By recognising early indicators of a relapse and having pre-planned steps in place, you can ensure you seek help early on. It is possible to reverse the relapse process and, in doing so, get back control.
Self Monitoring

‘Keeping a check on how I am feeling helps me manage anxiety better’.

Once you are aware of your red flags and the changes to thoughts and behaviours that can make you feel better, you can then start to ‘self monitor’. Self-monitoring involves developing an awareness of how you are feeling and ensuring that you take steps to manage your anxiety. By being more aware of how you are feeling, you will be able to put things in place early on to ensure you feel healthy and stay healthy.

One way of self-monitoring is to develop a rating scale for your anxiety where 0 could mean no anxiety and 10 could be high anxiety. If you can rate your anxiety on a daily basis, you will be able to determine how well you are managing your anxiety.

Once you are aware of your level of anxiety you can then assess if you need to increase any of your activities for positive anxiety management. This is often easier to plan in advance, for example:

When I notice I am avoiding situations, I need to do something before it worsens.

If I remember to focus on one problem at a time, I am able to manage my anxiety.

If other people notice that I am displaying my warning signs, this is an indication that I need to take action to improve things.

Developing a few, specific points to focus on if you are feeling anxious can be very helpful. This is often known as an ‘emergency plan’. An example of this is:

Changing your thinking:

- Stop!! Think and reflect on what you are thinking.
- Challenge any negative or unhelpful thinking.
- Talk to a therapist or mental health practitioner.

Changing your behaviour:

- Make a positive effort to stay in contact with people who you find supportive.
- Be honest! Tell people you are experiencing problems and that you would like some support.
- Tackle avoidance head on. If you have started to avoid situations and events, make an effort to carry out these activities even if it means experiencing anxiety.
- Create an action plan to do things you enjoy.
High Risk Situations

‘By thinking I had done something wrong because one of my friends had to cancel dinner arrangements, I became anxious and stressed out and felt as if I was back to square one’.

A large part of self monitoring is learning to be aware of possible high-risk situations where you could find yourself feeling particularly anxious or you could find it hard to cope. A vital way to prevent relapse may be to make sure you are aware of these specific situations and events and to have a plan in place to be able to effectively cope with them.

It is important that you identify high risk situations, as symptoms will often be initiated by particular times, places, people or events. *E.g. a person with agoraphobia may be more likely to experience symptoms of panic in a crowded building where they feel they are unable to escape.*

People deal with things in different ways and so these high-risk situations are highly subjective and personal.

High risk situations can be defined as times such as:

- When you feel someone has hurt you, let you down or upset you
- If an important situation goes wrong or you fear that it may go wrong
- When you think things appear to be out of your control

*It is important to remember that high risk situations or trigger events need to be managed carefully. Ensure that you plan what support you will need and how you can obtain that support. There will also be times where you will encounter triggers without warning. In these situations, look at what preventative factors you can access after the event to ensure you remain positive. (See next page)*

Try noting down your high risk situations - you can always add to this list at any time. If you encounter these situations again in the future, what would you need to do differently to manage them in a more positive way?

Preventative Factors

‘It became clear that if I had no structure to my day, I always felt much more anxious. Now I try to plan at least one enjoyable task per day so that I have something to focus on’.

In order to learn alternative ways of responding to high risk situations, you should aim to find new ways of coping with those situations. Strategies that are used for coping with unavoidable triggers will generally be skills that need to be learned and practised in order to be effective. These are known as Preventative Factors.
Preventative factors are behaviours or thoughts that we engage in on a regular basis because they make us feel good. By being aware of what regular things we can do to keep us feeling good, we can reduce the chances of us feeling low or anxious and help to maintain a balanced, positive mood. Preventative factors are often hard to identify as we tend to do them naturally and it is only when we stop doing them that we notice the change in the way that we feel.

**Preventative Strategies can include:**

**Talking about how you feel**

Talking with a friend, family member or trusted person about how you feel can often leave you feeling calmer and more comfortable. If you feel you need professional help and support, you can access therapy services.

**Relaxation techniques**

Relaxation techniques have been found to be very useful; these can include refocusing techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises (where you breathe from the diaphragm and not the chest) and progressive muscle relaxation which involves focusing on each muscle group, one at a time, and then tensing and relaxing the muscles.

**Active problem solving**

This involves looking at what the problem is, thinking of all possible solutions, identifying what the consequences of each are and then choosing what the best solution would be.

**Diary writing**

Writing a diary can be very helpful for some individuals. Writing down what you are experiencing can be an effective way of gaining a new perspective on the problem, making it easier to deal with.

**Cognitive restructuring**

Cognitive restructuring is a process that involves using positive affirmations such as “I am worthwhile” to replace the often irrational and inaccurate beliefs of “I am worthless”. This can also be linked to challenging negative thoughts and using guided imagery, (which can involve imagining yourself being in a different place or handling a situation in a different or more appropriate way).

**Rewarding yourself**

When you have avoided negative behaviours or used new coping skills - reward yourself. What you do does not matter as long as it is something which you enjoy. This can be something as simple as a trip to the cinema or reading your favourite book.

**Diet**

Paying attention to your diet can help you to improve your mood overall and may also help to reduce mood swings. A high sugar diet can often cause or exacerbate anxiety. Try to eat well balanced meals at set times so that you are providing your body with the correct nutrition at the right times. Additionally, by having your meals at set times, you are establishing a schedule for your body to work to. Stimulants such as caffeine, sugar etc can often exacerbate anxiety and can lead to the development of physical feelings of anxiety such as a racing heart rate etc.
Maintaining a healthy, balanced diet can also provide you with the added strength you need to successfully deal with stressful situations. Focussing on your diet will also help you to cope with any secondary stress symptoms which can include; loss of sleep, lack of appetite. It may also help eliminate problems such as sexual difficulties and breathing irregularities.

Exercise

When we get anxious, adrenaline rushes through our bodies to prepare us to either run or fight the feared object/situation. This causes the physical effects of anxiety such as feeling shaky, light headed etc. By undertaking regular activities such as walking, going to the gym, running, swimming etc you can burn off the adrenaline which will reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety.

Handling day to day problems / feelings as they happen

Handle any feelings and problems when they occur. This way pressure and stress (which can lead to anxiety) will not build up. The stress you are already feeling will only become worse if you put off dealing with any problems.

Making a plan

Preventing a relapse requires you to develop a plan that is tailored to maintaining new behaviours and thoughts. The plan could involve integrating positive behaviours into your daily routine. These activities could include diversion activities, various coping skills and emotional support.

Coping skills often involve asking for help from an experienced peer/family member or using relaxation skills to help reduce the strength of anxiety. Look for alternative activities and work on recognising your ‘red flags’. Finding different ways of dealing with emotional states and rehearsing new responses will help you to achieve more positive results from those events that you would have previously had difficulty managing.

Distraction / refocusing techniques

One of the most powerful coping skills a person can have is an ability to refocus their attention. This is due to the fact that when you are feeling anxious your whole attention is focused on anxious thoughts. Focusing your attention away from your anxious thoughts will distract you. An exercise you can do in order to refocus your attention can be something as simple as completing a word or number puzzle or even just counting objects that are in the room. Sometimes people may need to do activities that require a bit more concentration (for example, some people find exercises such as counting backwards from 100 in groups of three is useful) as it is often the case that the more mentally challenging an activity is, the quicker you will be able to reduce your anxiety.

Positive thinking / self talk

This includes putting together positive affirmations. Make sure you make them personal with the use of ‘I’, ‘Me’ and ‘My’. Ensure they are believable and realistic. Try to make them short and easy to remember. The more often you repeat these affirmations the more likely positive thinking will become your routine way of thinking.

Try listing the positive thoughts and behaviours that prevent you from feeling anxious and practice implementing these every day.

Now you have identified and practiced the positive behaviours and thoughts you already experience on a regular basis, ensure you maintain these as they are often great for boosting your confidence and they help banish anxiety!
How do I manage a relapse?

‘My relapse prevention plan was really simple to make, however, it also helps me to know that I have a plan of action to work towards when I am feeling down’.

Relapses can be very scary and those experiencing them can often feel that they are ‘getting ill’ again or that they are not coping well. However, if you have been able to notice that you are experiencing signs of a relapse, you are then able to do something about it. By increasing your awareness, you are ensuring that you can put your relapse prevention plan into action and reduce further negative symptoms before things get out of control.

The best time to produce a relapse prevention plan is when you are feeling positive and in control of your anxiety.

Ask other, trusted individuals to help you to put your plan together. These people could be friends, family, support workers, GPs or therapists.

The relapse prevention process can then be split up into separate sections; each looking at a separate way of managing your anxiety.

**Thoughts**

What positive thoughts improve your mood? Having one or two key phrases can be an excellent way of giving yourself a boost. By thinking these types of positive thoughts, you can reduce negative thinking which may lead to further anxiety and distress. If you become aware of an increase in your negative thinking, ensure that you increase your positive thinking and positive self talk, for example, ‘anxiety can be treated’, ‘I can control my anxiety’.

**Top tip to try!**

*Think really hard for a couple of minutes about an event that upset you. Picture it in your mind. On a scale of 1 - 10 rate your mood. Now think about the last time that you laughed your socks off! Really picture what happened and how you felt. Again, rate your mood on a scale of 1 - 10. Did your mood improve? Often our mood improves depending on what we are thinking, rather than what we are experiencing. Therefore you can change how you are feeling by thinking more positively.*

**Behaviours**

If you notice you are withdrawing from your usual social activities, try to encourage yourself to rejoin them. This way you are not giving in to avoidance and you are still maintaining positive activities. Try to ensure you are undertaking activities that you enjoy so that you are rewarding yourself for managing your anxiety.

*Aim to complete 3 tasks each day that you enjoy! Make them fun and different each time. By making sure you enjoy these tasks, you will be more likely to complete them.*
Medication

Taking medication for anxiety is a personal choice and should always be discussed with your GP. You should be aware of the types of medications that are available and the benefits and limitations of each. You can discuss medication issues with your GP or contact the NPS’ Psychiatric Pharmacy Helpline (available to members) which can provide you with clear information. Bear in mind that medication often takes up to 4-6 weeks to take effect and so you may not see any benefit until after this period.

A change for life

‘If you are allergic to something, you have to adjust your life to ensure you do not have a reaction. It is the same with anxiety; you have to make changes to your life to make sure you do all that you can to avoid a relapse’.

Most people assume that once they feel better they do not have to continue to use any of the strategies or plans they have put in place. This is not the case!! You will need to practice these strategies throughout your life. It is also important to realise your plan will need to change over time as your triggers and situations change. This could include not drinking alcohol (or only doing so in moderation) and not taking any non prescription drugs. Stopping smoking (or cutting down) can also help to combat anxiety symptoms. The consumption of large quantities of caffeine should also be avoided as it is a stimulant and as such, can have a negative affect on mental processes. Caffeine can also cause a racing heart - often associated with anxiety. Also try to ensure meals are balanced as the healthier our diet is, the healthier our bodies will be. Balanced meals equal more energy which has a positive impact on our mental health and can help us to be better prepared to cope with any problems. Ensuring you have a good night’s sleep is also recommended for the same reason. Exercising on a daily basis is known to stimulate better mental health. This can be anything from a short walk to vigorous and prolonged aerobic exercise. Relaxation techniques can also be very beneficial; including reading, meditating, yoga or even just taking warm baths. Having a daily routine can also be very helpful as having structure allows you to focus on something else which provides a useful distraction technique. It is important to be aware that as time goes on, our triggers and warning signs can change. To prepare ourselves for this we need to ensure we regularly update our plan.
What happens if I can’t manage my anxiety alone?

‘I found it really hard to handle my anxiety when I was doing it all myself, I decided to join a group and found that talking to others who understood how I felt made me feel much more positive’.

Sometimes we need a bit of help to manage our anxiety. Keep others informed about how you are feeling. Often friends and family can help to support you. They can talk to you about the pressures you have been feeling and, if they are made aware of what your relapse warning signs are, they can help you to look out for them. They can also be there to help you cope with the stress you are feeling. You may like to try all of these suggestions, or a combination of a few:

**Support from friends and family**

Friends and family are often the first people to notice relapse red flags and are best placed to help to support you through the experience. Take note of what others are telling you, they may be noticing something you are not!

Ask your friends and family to help support you when you are feeling low; often having other people around can make you feel much more positive.

_Some people are unable to speak to friends or family about the way they are feeling. If this is the case, you might like to consider joining a self help group._

**Self help groups**

These groups are often set up by people affected by a particular condition and are designed to offer a supportive environment where you can share your experiences of anxiety and gain support and information from others who understand how you are feeling. Gaining advice from those who have been similarly affected can be very positive as often no one understands the symptoms and effects more than someone who has experienced anxiety.

**Structured self help courses**

These are courses that are often designed around a Cognitive Behaviour Therapy model. The content of each session is often very specific and structured with sessions focussing on a specific condition.

_If you feel that you require more professional help, you may wish to consider talking to a mental health practitioner._

**GPs**

Your GP may be able to provide you with information on how to access specific services for support. They are also able to look at prescribing medication for anxiety or changing your current medication if you feel that it is not working for you. GPs can also refer you to your local Primary Care Mental Health Team (PCMHT) for further help, and / or other mental health practitioners as follows:-
Psychiatrist

If your anxiety is chronic and severe, your GP may refer you to a Psychiatrist. Psychiatrists are mental heath specialists who may prescribe medication and other appropriate treatments.

Counselling

Counselling is often known as person centred counselling. This is a talking treatment that adopts a client centred approach whereby the therapist attempts to create an environment where the aim is to help the client to explore their problems and to discover coping strategies. Counselling utilises a non-directive approach and can be delivered on a face-to-face basis or over the telephone. Counselling can be accessed through your GP and also through the National Phobics Society.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

CBT focuses on how your thinking and behaviours can have an effect on your moods and emotions. It focuses on how you are feeling in the ‘here and now’ and what can be done to improve the situation. Often problems can be broken down into smaller goals. Clients are asked to complete homework between sessions to practice techniques learnt in therapy. CBT can be delivered on a face to face basis or over the telephone and again can be accessed through your GP or via the National Phobics Society.

Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (cCBT)

cCBT involves the same principles as face-to-face therapy, however, it is delivered via a computer. There are now a number of computer packages available to use either at home or from clinic based locations which may be beneficial in treating anxiety disorders. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has recently recommended ‘Beating the Blues’ as an option for delivering cCBT in the management of mild and moderate depression, and FearFighter as an option for delivering cCBT in the management of panic and phobias. See: http://www.nice.org.uk/pdf/CCBT_FAD.pdf for more information.

There are also a number of free to access websites which provide cCBT. These are:

http://moodgym.anu.edu.au
http://www.livinglifetothefull.com
http://www.kpchr.org/feelbetter/
Clinical Hypnotherapy
This therapy uses hypnosis as a technique to promote relaxation. It can be used to relieve anxiety or to address problems, often through the use of visualisation techniques.

Alternative Therapies
These therapies do not focus on the actual problem but look to improve the situation via relaxation, energy focussing and spiritual healing. These techniques include:

- Reiki
- Spiritual Healing
- Aromatherapy
- Reflexology

Relapse prevention depends very much on your motivation to implement the strategies and techniques discussed in this booklet. If you are not interested in making life changes you are unlikely to follow a prevention plan. Individuals who are low in motivation may benefit more from participating in group or one on one therapy.
Various Factors of Relapse Prevention

‘There are so many ways of managing anxiety and you can always add new ones- you never stop learning!!’

Factors such as healthy eating, regular exercise, getting sufficient sleep, looking after your health, education, having reciprocally caring relationships and interests that are both productive and recreational all contribute towards relapse prevention.

Your social support systems will also play a large part in your maintenance plan. You may wish to develop a support system. Many research studies have demonstrated the importance of social support systems in helping to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Individuals who are socially isolated tend to display more symptoms of poor mental health. Accessing support groups (either in a face to face capacity or via the telephone or internet) is also a good way of obtaining support to manage your anxiety.

What to do if a relapse does occur

‘Having a relapse is scary, but I have learnt that there are things that I can do to reduce the chances of it happening again’.

If a relapse does occur it is important you try to reduce its length and intensity. This not only helps to improve your chances of a good recovery but it also helps to minimise the amount of disruption to your life. Try to identify the factors that have triggered your relapse. Once you have identified these, you will be able to refine your relapse prevention plan and start working towards avoiding any future relapses. Try not to become too disheartened if a relapse has occurred. Learn what you can from it and try to move on.

If a relapse does occur try doing the following:

• Sit down and try to remember how you had been feeling before the relapse occurred.

• Write down how you felt before, during and after the relapse. This may help you to gain some perspective

• Make a plan of how you will try to handle the situations, feelings and emotions that led to the relapse if they should occur again in order to try to prevent a relapse.

• It can often be a good idea to call someone and talk to them about how you feel. Isolating yourself and trying to deal with it alone will often make it seem far worse than it actually is.

• Remember to remind yourself that just because you have had a relapse this does not mean that you have failed.
It is important you develop a knowledge base; learn everything you can about your anxiety and the treatments that are available to you. Try to create a balance in your life with enough time for work, family, friends and leisure activities. Often, isolating yourself will be more likely to cause a relapse again whereas asking for help and support can prevent future relapses. Plan your time; focus on what is to come, not what has already happened as that can't be changed.

If you have experienced a relapse, try not to panic or feel disheartened. The best thing you can do is to learn from what has happened. As you started to feel better, you may have slipped back into carrying out the thoughts and behaviours that led to your anxiety or forgotten the ones that made you feel positive. This is very common - we all get complacent! However, good mental health is not something we can take for granted and we have to practice putting into place the things that keep us mentally well.

When things are going well we stop focusing on the problem and move our attention elsewhere. While this can be seen as a good thing in one sense (as it means you are not just focusing on your problems) it also can mean we stop doing the things that help us to manage our anxiety. This can mean that the preventative factors are not in place and can make a relapse more likely.

Having the knowledge about what will help you to manage your anxiety will only be useful if you are able to ensure you are taking the best action to control your anxiety.

It is important that you try not to feel guilty, frustrated or discouraged if you are experiencing a relapse. If you find that you are feeling this way, remind yourself that negative feelings will pass and try to look at relapse as something you can learn from. Return to your relapse prevention plan and by making a few modifications, you can avoid further relapses.

Keep in mind recovery is a process and that as such there will be ups and downs. Just remember what has worked for you in the past, so that when a relapse does occur you can start doing these things again.

As before, develop your knowledge around what you are affected by; keep up to date with what is happening regarding anxiety and the treatments that are available. There may be something new available now that was not available previously when you first started suffering.
Relapse Prevention Checklist

1. How did you feel when your anxiety was not under control? What things were you not able to enjoy or do?

2. How does it feel when you are controlling your anxiety? What things are you able to enjoy?

3. What techniques have you learned?

4. What have you found useful?

5. How can you put what you have found useful into action?

6. What might be barriers to this?

7. How can you overcome these?

8. How do you know when you are feeling worse? What are the symptoms? What are your red flags?
9. What are your difficult situations?


10. If you had a set back, how would you cope?


11. Who could help you to cope? How would they help?


12. What thoughts or behaviours will keep you motivated to maintain your new positive ways of managing your anxiety?


Relapse Prevention Checklist (cont’d)
Glossary

Barriers: Obstacles which may prevent you from achieving your goals or behaving and thinking in a positive manner.

cCBT: Computerised Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

CBT: Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

High Risk Situations: Situations which are more likely to be difficult to manage or which you feel may make your anxiety worse.

Lapses: A small slip in behaviour or thought that is recognised and challenged.

Maintenance Plan: Plan to manage your anxiety by using preventative factors.

Preventative Factors: Thoughts, behaviours, situations or objects which make us feel good and reduce the chances of us feeling low or anxious.

Relapses: An increase in unhelpful thinking / behaviours after a period of experiencing improved / better mental health.

Red flags: Signs that you are feeling unwell or that indicate that you are not controlling your anxiety as well.

Self Monitoring: The process of monitoring your anxiety on a regular basis.

Trigger: People, specific events, objects or thoughts that lead to an increase in anxiety.
Further Help and Support from the National Phobics Society

Should you require further help and support, the National Phobics Society is able to provide support and information.

You may wish to view our catalogue of fact sheets and booklets online: www.phobics-society.org.uk

Our confidential, national helpline services is available 9.15am – 9pm weekdays and is staffed by trained volunteers with personal experience of anxiety disorders. We are able to provide support and information to callers about all aspects of anxiety. For more information and support, please call 0870 122 2325. Similarly, we operate an email support service which is available to any individual affected by anxiety. Please email: support@phobics-society.org.uk.

We are also able to offer our members low cost, high quality therapy services including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Clinical Hypnotherapy and Counselling. Visit the website or call the helpline for further information.

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