Self-harm Treatment

It is important for anyone who self-harms to see their GP, who will aim to treat the underlying emotional cause as well as any physical injury. Your GP is likely to ask you about your feelings in some detail. They will want to establish why you self-harm, what triggers it and how you feel afterwards.

Your GP may ask you some questions to see if you have an underlying condition such as depression, anxiety or borderline personality disorder. If the way you self-harm follows a particular pattern of behaviour, such as an eating disorder, you may be asked additional questions about this. Your height, weight and blood pressure may also be checked, and you may be asked about any drinking or drug-taking habits.

It is important that you are honest with your GP about your symptoms and your feelings. If you don’t know why you self-harm, tell your GP this.

Specialist referral

Recent research indicates that most teenagers who self-harm are able to give up this behaviour as they learn to manage feelings in healthier ways, for example, by talking to others.

However, some young people who self-harm continue to do so into adulthood and if you fall into this category, your GP may refer you to a mental health professional. This could be:

- a counsellor – somebody who is trained in talking therapies
- a psychiatrist – a qualified medical doctor with further training in treating mental health conditions
- a psychologist – a health professional who specialises in the assessment and treatment of mental health conditions

For example, if you have lost a close relative, you may be referred to a specialist grief counsellor for help coping with bereavement. If you are self-harming after an incident of rape, or physical or mental abuse, you may be referred to someone who is trained in dealing with victims of sexual assault or domestic abuse.

If you have another condition that is linked to your self-harming, such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia, you may be referred to a specialist in eating disorders and a dietitian or nutritionist (somebody who specialises in nutrition).

It might also be recommended that you attend a self-help group, for example, Alcoholics Anonymous if you are misusing alcohol, or Narcotics Anonymous if you are misusing drugs. These groups can offer support as you try to stop your self-harming behaviour.
Assessment

You may be offered a psychosocial assessment, which aims to investigate all the factors that contribute to your self-harming, including:

- social factors – for example, your relationships with others
- psychological factors – your feelings and emotions
- motivational factors – what made you want to do it

You will be asked about your current feelings, particularly if you are feeling hopeless or considering suicide. If you have any other symptoms, either physical or emotional, you will also be asked about these.

After the assessment you will be allowed to read through what has been written to make sure that you agree with it. Any further treatment will, if possible, be decided jointly between you and your mental health professional. It will be a specific programme for you according to your needs and what is likely to be effective. You will be asked for your consent before any treatment begins.

Seeking immediate help for an injury or overdose

Some physical injuries may need treating in an accident and emergency (A&E) department, minor injuries unit or walk-in centre. For example, you may need to call 999 for an ambulance if:

- you or somebody else have taken an overdose of drugs, alcohol or prescription medication
- somebody is unconscious
- you or somebody else are in a lot of pain
- you or somebody else are having difficulty breathing
- you or somebody else are losing a lot of blood from a cut or wound
- you or somebody else are in shock after a serious cut or burn

If your injury is not serious, you could be treated at a minor injuries unit (MIU). These healthcare services are run by doctors or nurses to assess and treat minor injuries, such as:

- minor burns and scalds
- infected wounds
- broken bones