Self-harm prevention tips

Recognize the need for professional help

If you've harmed yourself to the point of severe injury (that is, inflicting a cut that bled for more than 10 minutes or intentionally nicking major veins or arteries), or if you've had suicidal thoughts, seek help immediately. No matter what your issue, age, gender, or background, never feel ashamed to seek help.

Tell someone you trust

This is one of the hardest things to do, but it's also one of the most important. Building a stable support system for yourself can help you transition from cutting to recovery. Confide in a close family member, friend or member of your clergy or congregation.

Remove objects from your immediate area

If you have time to search for something harm yourself with, you may just be able to crush the impulse. One minute can determine whether or not you self harm. Don't keep sharp objects on your table, and don't put razors in a close drawer or cupboard. Try to distract yourself when you get the urge.

Identify the triggers

The moment you have the urge to harm yourself, stop and think of what has just occurred. Remember it and try to avoid these situations. Determine what in particular makes this situation trigger off negative emotions: a certain feeling, or maybe an action? Work on reducing this issue until you have it under control or completely diminished.

Harm control

A good idea is to wear a rubber band around your wrist. Every time you want to cut, snap the rubber band against your wrist instead. You can also draw on your wrist with red pen, or rub an ice cube on your wrist. Another option, which is good for people who are allergic to latex, would be to grab a handful of ice cubes and hold them for a minute or two until your hands hurt and then let go of them. Screaming at the top of your lungs into a pillow might help, as well.
Express your emotions safely

Replace the time you would usually spend self-harming with other activities that allow you to explore your feelings without hurting yourself. Enjoy a hobby, doing exercises or write a journal.

Volunteer, or nurture something

Turn your focus outward to your community, a pet, or anything else that could use your help. Volunteer at your local shelter or hospital, or donate your time to a family member or neighbor in need. Alternatively, you could direct your energy to caring for something that is dependent on you for survival, such as a pet or garden. These activities can help you feel productive and dependable, and make you notice that you do matter.

Try to stop self-harming episodes

As soon as you feel the urge to harm yourself, take a deep breath, fold your arms, close your eyes and relax. Tell yourself that you are not going to self harm. Get away from any objects you may use to harm yourself so it’s not as easy to break your resolution. If possible, lie down somewhere. Stay like this until the urge goes, then quickly phone a help line or use another means of getting help.

Love yourself

No matter what anyone else tells or what you think they think about you, you should love yourself. When you love someone, you don’t hurt them. Make a list of the things you like about yourself, or compliments people have paid you in the past. Refer to it often when you’re feeling worthless or sad, and read it aloud to yourself.

Stay positive

Remember: this will get better. Recovering from any addiction or self-destructive behaviour takes patience and persistence, but you can do it. Reward yourself for your progress, and don’t dwell on setbacks - they are only temporary.