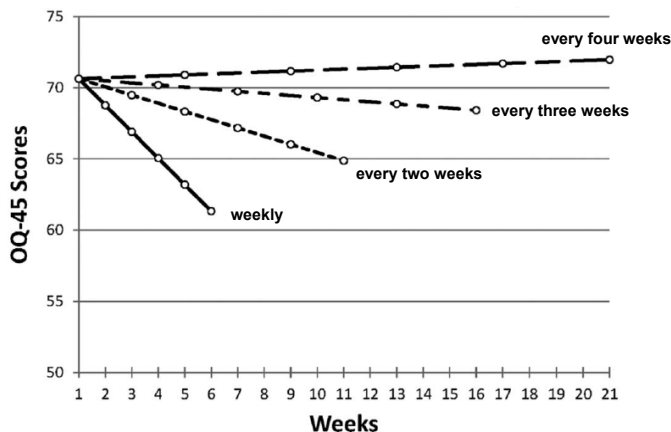


How to get the most out of CBT

Cognitive-behavioural therapy is a collaborative treatment - that is, you and your therapist actively work together to help you get the most out of therapy. Research shows that several key “ingredients” can help you to be an active and effective participant in your treatment, so that you may notice benefits sooner.

1. Attend weekly sessions

Regular attendance is one of the strongest predictors of good treatment outcomes. Weekly sessions help keep up momentum, make it easier to remember what you learned, and allow you to build skills more quickly. A study of over 21,000 people found that those who came to therapy every week improved significantly faster than those who came every two weeks. By the end of treatment, weekly clients had made greater overall progress.



(Erekson, Lambert, & Egget, 2015)

2. Practice between sessions

Therapy is not just what happens in the room. Practicing skills in your daily life strengthens learning and helps you see real-world changes. Some people think the one-hour session is ‘the therapy’. In reality, it is more like a training session - the real therapy happens when you use the strategies in the other 167 hours of the week. Research shows that CBT with “homework” tasks is almost twice as effective as CBT without it.



This makes sense when you think of therapy skills like any other skill. If you were learning to play guitar and only practiced once a week, progress would be slow. But practicing a little every day helps you improve much faster. Therapy works the same way - small steady steps add up to meaningful change.

In CBT, it is generally recommended that each strategy be practiced at least 3-4 times per week as the minimum “dose” for effective treatment.

3. Keep an open and curious attitude

CBT may introduce new ways of thinking and behaving. Some strategies may feel unusual, unfamiliar, or uncomfortable at first - that’s completely normal. Having an open and curious attitude helps you get the most out of therapy because it allows you to experiment with new skills rather than judging them too quickly.



For example, instead of saying “This won’t work for me”, try “I’ll give it a go and see what I notice” or “This didn’t work for me in the past, but now is a different time and I can approach it differently”. Ask yourself questions such as “What might happen if I try this?” or “What can I learn from this exercise?”.

4. Reflect on your progress



Try to take time to notice what is helping and where you feel stuck. You and your therapist are a team, and your feedback helps shape the process. Share what is working and what isn’t so that you and your therapist can adjust the strategies to suit your life as much as possible.

For example, if you haven’t been able to practice a strategy at home, be honest with your therapist about what got in the way. Together, you can problem-solve and adjust the plan so it fits better with your life.

5. Be kind to yourself

Change takes time. It’s important to be patient with yourself and recognise effort, not just results. Some strategies can feel challenging, and it’s normal for symptoms to sometimes feel worse before they improve. Studies show that self-compassion reduces stress and improves wellbeing. When needed, remind yourself of why you started therapy in the first place and keep those goals in mind.

For example, instead of saying “I’m failing”, try “I’m learning, and it’s okay to take small steps”.

6. Talk about therapy with trusted people

If you feel comfortable, sharing parts of your therapy with supportive people can be helpful. Loved ones can encourage you, remind you to practice strategies, or simply understand what you’re working on. Teaching someone else what you’ve learned can also strengthen your own understanding.

For example, if you’ve made a plan for when you’ll practise your strategies, you might share it with a family member, partner, or friend so they can gently remind you or help you stay on track.

