

Information for patients, families and carers

Clinical Health Psychology for people with gastrointestinal difficulties

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is about the Clinical Health Psychology service for people with gastrointestinal difficulties. It explains what a clinical psychologist is, what they can help with and what you can expect from a first appointment.

This leaflet is for adults experiencing gastrointestinal difficulties, such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and proctitis.

What is a clinical psychologist?

Clinical psychologists are specially trained professionals. They have a minimum of six years' accredited training and are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council.

Unlike psychiatrists, clinical psychologists are not medically trained doctors. They do not give medical advice or prescribe medication; they use Talking Therapy instead.

What does a clinical psychologist specialising in gastroenterology do?

The clinical psychologist you see will understand the psychological effects that gastrointestinal difficulties and its treatments can have.

Gastrointestinal difficulties such as IBD, ulcerative colitis and crohn's (as well as others), are long term conditions and can have a major impact on people's lives. It is understandable to feel distressed by having a gastrointestinal difficulty. Some people with these conditions benefit from more specialist support than what can be given by family, friends or other health care professionals.

Talking to a clinical psychologist about how you are thinking and feeling, is often the first step to creating change.

How can a clinical psychologist specialising in gastroenterology help me?

The service offers psychological assessment and interventions for people experiencing distress because of gastrointestinal difficulties.

You may be feeling anxious about what will happen, sad about things you can no longer do, or angry at what seems unfair. These are all very natural emotions. Often such feelings ease, particularly as people become more confident over time.

Sharing these feelings with family or friends might be all that you need. However, some people may have thoughts and feelings that they do not wish to share with the people they know, or you may feel that you need additional support. This is when a clinical psychology referral may be helpful.

The range of problems that can affect people may include, but are not limited to:

- Changes in your day-to-day functioning
- Symptoms such as fatigue, bloating, constipation or diarrhoea
- Coping with feelings of shock, embarrassment or fear
- Worry about symptoms getting worse
- Uncertainty about the future
- Fears about food
- Adjustment difficulties
- Coping with treatment side effects
- Changes in relationships or intimacy
- Low self-esteem or body image
- Coping with flare ups

Who can use the service?

You can access the service if you are an adult with a diagnosis of a gastrointestinal difficulty and are under the care of a gastroenterologist at Bolton NHS Foundation Trust.

If you are interested in the service, please speak to your gastroenterology team about a referral. The service is unable to accept self-referrals.

You will receive an opt-in letter through the post from the Clinical Health Psychology service. Once you confirm you wish to attend, you will be offered an assessment appointment. This can be face to face, via telephone or video call.

What will happen at my assessment appointment?

Appointments last around 50-60 minutes and take place at Great Lever Health Centre if you choose to attend in person. A professional interpreter can be arranged if needed.

The first appointment is an opportunity to discuss your health concerns and the impact of your health condition on your life and emotions. This helps to develop an understanding of you and your needs. You may be asked to complete some questionnaires about how you are feeling.

You will be asked what you would like help with. A joint plan between you and your clinical psychologist, of what will happen next, will be discussed.

Following your first appointment, you may agree to a further assessment session or a period of psychological therapy sessions. Where the impact of the gastrointestinal difficulty does not appear to be the main concern, we may discuss a referral to a more appropriate service.

If psychological therapy is agreed, sessions will focus on your hopes. You and your psychologist will work together to create change.

The psychologist may use handouts, videos or other information within sessions. They may also suggest some tasks for you to do in between sessions.

Can I bring someone with me to the first appointment?

You are welcome to bring someone with you to the first appointment. It will be important for you to feel able to discuss your difficulties openly with this person present, so please consider this carefully.

Your psychologist may suggest that you attend some, or all further appointments on your own.

How many appointments will I have?

As each person is different, it is difficult to estimate how many appointments you will have.

You and your psychologist will jointly agree the number of appointments you have and how often they occur. Some people have one or two appointments. Some may have weekly or fortnightly appointments for several weeks or months.

If therapy sessions are agreed, you will see the same psychologist at each session.

Are the appointments confidential?

Yes.

A summary letter of the initial appointment will be sent to you. A copy of this letter will also be sent to the clinician who referred you and your GP.

Clinical psychologists work as part of a multi-disciplinary team and at times, it may be necessary to share some information with other colleagues.

This will only happen if:

- It will improve the care that you receive
- It is necessary to refer you to another specialist

- There are situations involving risk of harm to you or another

Before sharing any information, the clinical psychologist, where possible, will discuss this with you. If you have concerns about confidentiality, please let the psychologist know.

Do I have to see the psychologist?

No.

If you do attend, it is important that you are there because you want to be. Attending an assessment appointment does not mean that you must have further sessions.

Contact information

The Clinical Health Psychology Service can be contacted on 01204 390 045 or clinicalhealthpsychology@boltonft.nhs.uk.

If you require a copy of this leaflet in any other language or format, such as large print or audio, please contact **01204 390193**.

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