

# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY: BREAKING THE CYCLE

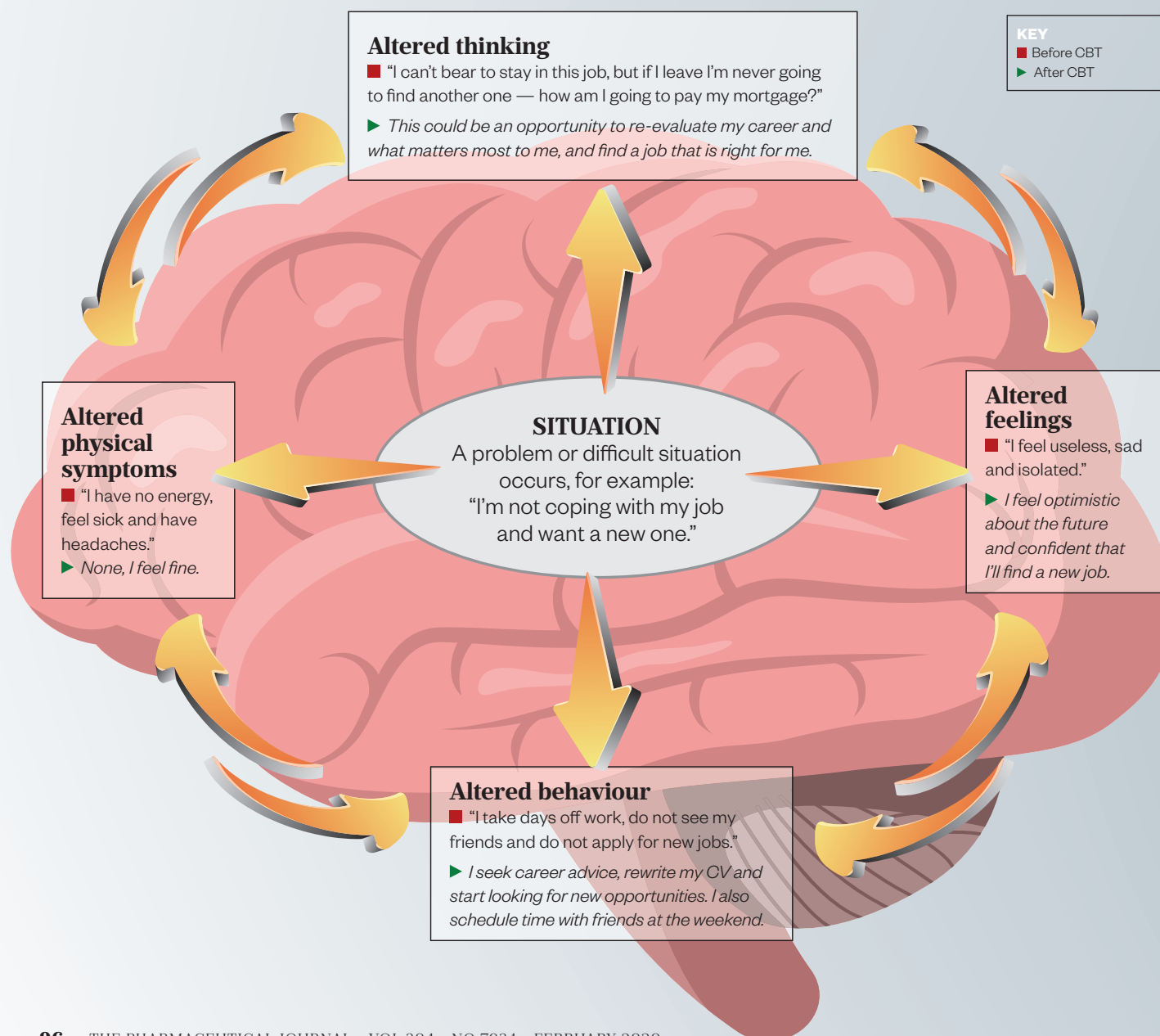
The most common alternative to pharmacological treatment offered to patients with depression and anxiety by the NHS is cognitive behavioural therapy, or 'CBT'. This guide details how it works.

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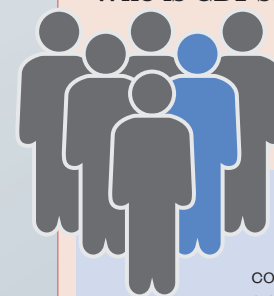


## How does CBT work?

- CBT is based on the concept that thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms and behaviours are interconnected.
- CBT challenges people to identify unhelpful thoughts and evaluate evidence for and against them.
- This process allows problems to be addressed more realistically, and emotions to be proportional.
- Making a change in one of these areas can break the cycle and result in more helpful thinking patterns and behaviours.
- A course of CBT can be up to 20 sessions, usually once per week or fortnight, with each session lasting 30–60 minutes.



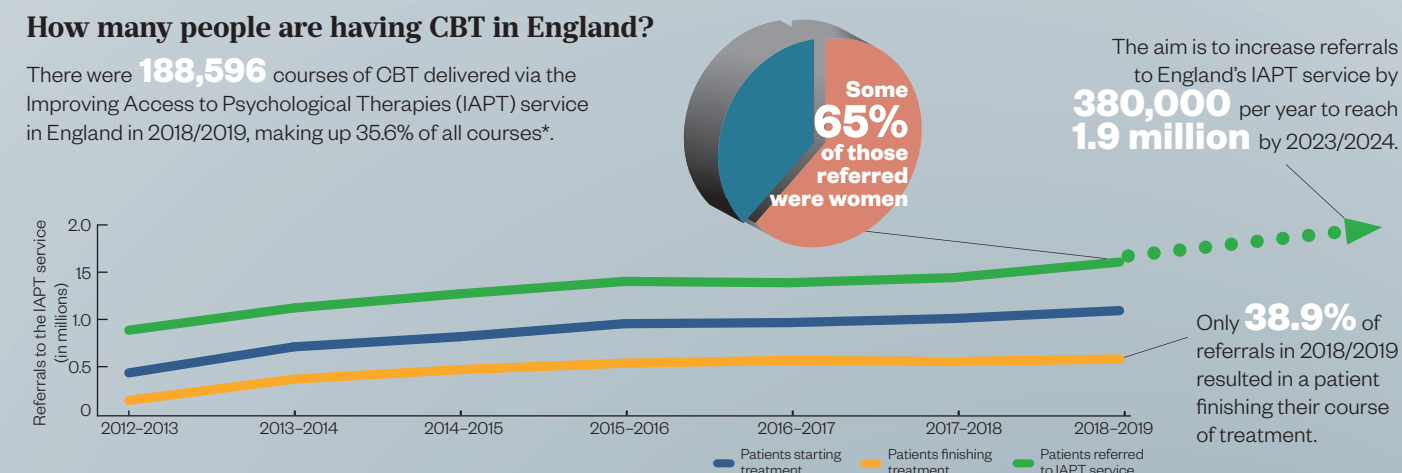
## Who is CBT suitable for?



- In England, one in six adults (17.0%) — one in five women (20.7%) and one in eight men (13.2%) — experienced anxiety and depression in 2014. Prevalence in men has been steady since 2000, although it has increased in women;
- Medication was the most common form of mental health treatment in 2014, reported by 11.6% of people, compared with 3.0% who reported receiving psychological therapy;
- CBT is broadly equivalent to antidepressants in its effectiveness across the range of severities for depression. A combination of CBT and antidepressants has been shown to be more effective than antidepressants alone;
- The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that patients with mild-to-moderate depression or anxiety, who have not responded to lower-intensity interventions — such as self-help or a physical exercise programme — should be offered psychological therapy, such as CBT, with drug therapy reserved for people with a history of severe depression, long-standing depression or in whom previous interventions have failed (see Learning article, page 120);
- NICE recommends a combination of psychological therapy and drug therapy in people with moderate-to-severe depression;
- NICE recommends children with mild depression are not offered drug treatment initially, but instead should be offered psychological therapy.

## How many people are having CBT in England?

There were **188,596** courses of CBT delivered via the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service in England in 2018/2019, making up 35.6% of all courses\*.



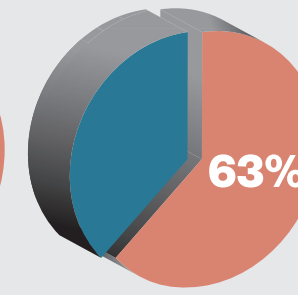
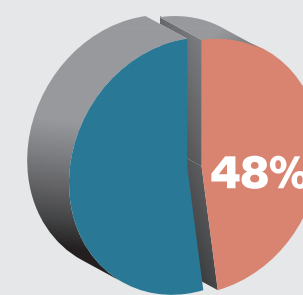
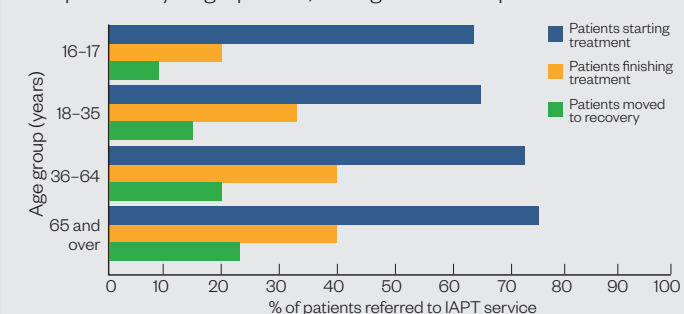
## How long are people waiting?

Although the IAPT service is meeting waiting time targets nationally, access varies across England, and people are waiting a long time between their first appointment (often an initial assessment) and their second appointment, when treatment usually starts.



## Does CBT work?

Older patients are more likely to enter IAPT\* treatment and finish a course compared with younger patients, although fewer older patients are referred.



\*The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies service includes a range of talking therapies, such as guided and non-guided self-help, CBT, counselling, psychoeducational peer support and mindfulness.

Sources: Cochrane Database of Syst Rev, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, NHS, NHS Digital, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Shutterstock.com.

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Graphic: Wayne McLean