

Top Tips for Managing Self-Harm

Identify your Triggers

An important step in managing self-harm is identifying triggers. Keep a diary and when you self-harm take notice of what happened in the hours beforehand. Had you been feeling upset or lonely? Did something stressful happen? Once you know your triggers you can start to work towards eliminating them. For example, if you self-harm when something stressful happens you can work towards learning alternate strategies for coping with stress.

Check In With Yourself

It can sometimes feel like stress and anxiety come on suddenly without any warning. This is sometimes true, but not paying attention to our feelings can also make it seem like they come out of the blue. Set an alarm on your phone every few hours and rate your level of anxiety/sadness/stress out of 10. For scores over 4/10, make a plan to help yourself cope (rather than put it off until later) so you avoid feeling overwhelmed by the situation.

Make a Safety Plan

It's important to seek help to manage your self-harm, but there are a number of things you can try to keep yourself safe. For example, remove self-harm objects from your home – get rid of sharp knives, cigarette lighters, razor blades, and anything else you use to harm yourself. If you're feeling vulnerable it might also be helpful to: make sure you're around other people, phone a friend or Lifeline (13 11 14), journal about how you're feeling, go for a walk or a run, do something to distract yourself (e.g. bake cookies for a friend, clean the house).

Manage Urges to Self-Harm

Urges might *feel* like they're going to hang around for ever, but they won't – they always pass. Practice waiting out your urges to self-harm; start with small blocks of time – see if you can delay acting on your urge by 5-minutes. If at the end of 5-minutes it feels like you can wait it out for longer, wait another 5-minutes. Make a list of things you can do to keep busy while you're waiting out your urge.

Try Alternatives

If your urge to self-harm is particularly strong there are other strategies you can use to trigger physical pain without causing physical harm; eat a chili, hold ice-cubes in your hands until they start to sting, snap an elastic band against your wrist, or stand under a really cold shower. These strategies are a temporary solution – so if you find that you need to use these strategies, it's important to seek help. These strategies will help to relieve your distress in the short-term but they won't help to resolve the underlying causes of your self-harm.

Self-Harm

Self-harm is a term used to describe actions that are deliberately harmful but not fatal. It affects nearly 8% of Australians. Examples of self-harm are:

- Cutting
- Self-inflicted burns
- Self-directed aggression
- Swallowing pills or sharp objects

Some forms of self-harm are less direct and involve self-injury in a more round-about way, like:

- Neglecting to manage an illness
- Misuse of drugs and alcohol
- Risky behaviour

Why someone self-harms will vary but common reasons are:

- To cope with distress
- To cope with stressful periods
- To manage anxiety and depression
- To manage guilt and shame
- To feel more in control
- Self-punishment
- To feel connected and real
- To communicate a lack of coping to others

If you rely on self-harm to cope the prospect of stopping can be daunting, especially if self-injury is a longstanding coping mechanism – but it is possible to cope without it.

Try these tips but also ask your GP for a referral to a clinical psychologist.