

# A Bright approach to stopping self-harming

## Introduction

Self-harming is a complex and paradoxical business. For many people, self-harming can even overtake the original emotional distress as a life ruining (and life threatening) problem. This short, practical website feature is very specifically about self-harming behaviour rather than about the intense emotional issues which propel people to self-harm.

There are already some excellent resources about self-harming out there, most of which address the underlying emotional dynamics. But, as with so many health issues, it's hard to know which ones are useful and which confusing or positively damaging. This is particularly the case when we're in the midst of emotional crises - by definition not the greatest time for calm, leisurely, reflective information gathering! Everyone's circumstances are, of course, unique. But there are enough similarities in people's experiences of self-harming and of what can help, to make it seem worthwhile to add to the available information.

We decided to write the following, as it's information we wish we'd known when self-harming first became an issue for us, personally or professionally. As with everything from making ice-cream to tackling pollution, there are a load of different theories, models, and counter-models to choose from. Several of these are firmly rooted in understanding, and challenging, the social context in which the underlying distress occurs. One particularly compelling description of this is in the Women's Press excellent handbook *Women and Self Harm* by Gerrilyn Smith, Dee Cox and Jacqui Saradjian

Our contribution to this medley is based on a fusion of particular approaches that some of us have found particularly useful in managing, and finally stopping, our self harming. We hope that it will be of direct help to some people, and that others will find a few ideas or resources which they find worth exploring.

Because we feel that for many people there's a need for very different types of information, and support, at different stages of self-harming, we've

arranged this section in the order of the main 'phases'. This approach is based on Prochaska's *Stages of Change* model, which is presented in easy, self-help style in the book *Change for Good*.

## Bright

Bright works with other charities to help them make their communications easy to understand. We are particularly interested in producing information that complements and fills the gaps in the materials which already exist. The gap may be in approach or specific contents. Our starting point in relation to self-harming is that all along we need to be at least trying to head in the direction of eventually stopping. But while we're still feeling the need to use self harm to cope with emotional trauma, we need to do so in ways which create the least possible damage and risk.

Bright is developing a project to support women in prison who self-harm, in partnership with Mental Health Media ([www.mhmedia.com](http://www.mhmedia.com)) and Prisons Advice and Care Trust ([www.imprisonment.org.uk](http://www.imprisonment.org.uk)).

## For people at each stage

*Benefit from the excellent information that's out there*

Sometimes the best information and support can come from organisations with expertise including but beyond self-harming. Excellent resources for people in emotional distress are available from:

Mind (National Association for Mental Health) [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
Rethink (supporting people with severe mental illness) [www.rethink.org.uk](http://www.rethink.org.uk)  
And the user-led Manic Depression Fellowship has a widely admired self-management programme whose relevance is valuable not just to people with this particular diagnosis. [www.mdf.org.uk/services/smt.html](http://www.mdf.org.uk/services/smt.html)

There's no shortage of information about self-harming, and the sheer extent of it can itself be off-putting. We'd particularly recommend the book *The Scarred Soul* by Tracy Alderman. The book is empathetic and informative and has a series of very useful self-help exercises. Similarly, *Women and Self Harm* is very practical and is co-written by a woman who self-harmed. It, unusually for self-harm publications, has a very mellow, constructive chapter for friends and family. Other excellent resources specific to self-harm include:

Bristol Crisis Centre for Women [www.users.zetnet.co.uk/BCSW/](http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/BCSW/)  
Lifesigns [www.lifesigns.ukf.net](http://www.lifesigns.ukf.net)  
The Scar Information Service [www.scarinfo.org](http://www.scarinfo.org)

There's a very comprehensive resources' list on the National Self Harm Network's website. [www.nshn.co.uk/resources.html](http://www.nshn.co.uk/resources.html). Their own resources, such as the Hurt Yourself Less Workbook, are particularly useful for people with very severe and long-term problems with self-harming. Conversely, the tone and contents may be counter-productive for some people with less chronic and less risky self-harming practices.

*Consider whether your self-harming has addictive aspects*

For many of us, self-harming becomes an addiction. This makes it even harder to avoid self-harming when we're distressed but can also draw us to having overwhelming cravings to hurt ourselves at other times. Some people find that using the 12 Steps approach of groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous can enable them to beat the addiction. These groups and networks are consistently welcoming and supportive and should be unfazed about including those of us who self-harm with implements rather than substances.

You may feel that your self-harming is a specific, contained response to extreme emotional distress rather than having a strong attraction in itself. However, there are still valuable lessons from the addiction field for all of us. A phrase that's often used in *12 Steps* programmes is that addicts "isolate and use on the feelings". In other words, we shut ourselves off, or away and instead of expressing our feelings (ideally to other people), we "use" - in our case, with implements or similar rather than with drink or drugs.

There are various specific aspects of addiction treatment which we can benefit from, including

- Having a structured recovery programme
- Having a strong network of support (as provided for by the regular AA, NA etc meetings that people attend)
- Having a 'sponsor' - similar to a mentor or role model
- Resisting engaging in the damaging behaviour "one day at a time" - or if that feels impossible, an hour, minute or even second at a time

Contact Alcoholics Anonymous via [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk) or on 0845 769 7555

"I felt rather fraudulent as a teetotaler at my first AA meeting! But people were very welcoming and I've found the regular support and focus an essential part of helping me to stop self-harming."

*Some information can make things worse. Much much worse*

Perhaps controversially, we'd strongly recommend that at some stages it's much better not looking at any resources specifically for people who self-harm. This is especially so for people who may be struggling with not starting to self-harm. In our experience, reading about the experiences of people who self-harm can make us more likely to want, and learn how, to experiment with this. The parallels with drug abuse are obvious. The mental health organisations listed above (Mind, Rethink, MDF) may well be safer sources of more general information and advice.

### *Be prepared!*

We've found it pretty essential always to have to hand (to bag, to pocket etc...) a list of diversion techniques and also of phone numbers of people to ring when, or ideally before, things feel intolerable. It can be too difficult to think of or find these things in the midst of great emotional distress. And it's also worth carrying around one or two of the portable resources suggested in the section below - along the lines of hand-held puzzles rather than a nicely stocked fridge....

Ironically, it works much better to practice when we don't need to! In other words, to become familiar with some of the specialised techniques when we're not feeling great distress nor feeling like self-harming. It's very hard to get to grips with anything new and demanding when all our energy is going into simply trying to cope with the overwhelming feelings of the moment.

### *Breathe a bit better*

Virtually every (good) book about stress and distress describes the benefits of improved breathing 'techniques'. Either there is a global respiratory conspiracy going on, or there really is something therapeutic about harnessing our breathing to help our recovery. One of the best explanations of this process is in the fabulous book *Instant Calm* by Paul Wilson. Reassuringly, he's not a sandal-wearing mountain-top dweller, but a high-powered advertising exec! So he does really know about excessive demands and pressures.

### *Trusted friends and family*

You'd do it for them so let them do it for you. Let them listen. Empathise. Laugh with you. Cry with you. Give you too much wine/chocolate/advice. Most of them may not be able to understand the paradoxical nature of self-harming, but they'll still be able to show that they care for and love you. And that they want to support you not to be in the terrible sort of state which compels you to self-harm.

### *24/7 Listening - and more*

The Samaritans provide an amazing service, day and night, 365 days a year. Of course they're best known for their phone service, but they also provide support by email, letter and face-to-face with people coming into their local branches. (And they train prisoners to become Listeners. And they have stands at festivals!). To contact the Samaritans:

Phone: 08457 909090 or email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or write to:

Chris  
P.O. Box 90 90  
Stirling  
FK8 2SA

Speak to someone face to face at a local branch by finding the address by ringing, writing or emailing, or from your local phone directory.

"I've found it very reassuring that I can speak to The Samaritans when I'm in too bad a state to speak to friends. I don't need to worry about them being upset and they're always supportive and constructive."

## **For people who recognise that they're on the brink of starting to self-harm**

*Hang on!*

So much about self-harming is counter-intuitive. It's something that people turn to out of desperation and although it can seem to help us get through traumatic times, it is a very short-term solution. Talk about building up much bigger problems for later on! What we're doing when we embark on self-harming as a response to great emotional distress is adding yet another source of anguish and conflict to our lives. To make matters worse, it is generally an escalatory activity - i.e. we have to use increasingly severe practices to get the same emotional result as previously. As if that weren't enough, for some of us it develops its own addictive dynamics. It's a real mess and if there's any way of avoiding plummeting into it, every minute or ounce of energy spent resisting is a brilliant investment.

Many people don't exactly contemplate starting to self-harm - the first time it just happens, at a moment of intense distress and probably of 'spacing out'. But for other people it may be something they think or fantasise about for some time before deciding, or having the opportunity, to begin doing it. In which case the following may be of help.

It could be regarded as untrendy or even naïve advice but ..... we'd really urge you to try everything you possibly can not to start resorting to self-harming. It

may take exceptional will-power to resist, but it's well worth it and still likely to be less hard than trying to stop this once it has become an entrenched habit.

"I'd been fantasising about self-harming for weeks before I finally decided to do it. Although it would have felt very frustrating not to have shifted from imagining to doing, there's no question that it would have saved me much misery, energy and time in the time that's followed."

### *Things that might help*

We fully appreciate that it can be agonising trying to resist the impulse to self-harm, but many people have achieved this, by:

- wherever possible, addressing the causes of the emotional distress. There will, however, be situations where this is almost impossible, perhaps because the environment is so intolerable (as with prison), or because the extent of the emotional crisis feels too great to begin exploring the underlying causes.
- talking to friends (make sure your address book is up to date!)
- talking to their GP, if the GP is someone they trust and respect
- getting counselling (via the GP, local phone book, library or British Association of Counselling [www.counselling.co.uk](http://www.counselling.co.uk))
- .... or counselling's slightly more intense sibling - therapy. The British Psychological Society have a register of qualified psychologists [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)
- reading about coping with severe emotional distress - Mind, the national mental health organisation, is probably the best source of information and contacts <http://www.mind.org.uk>
- ringing or emailing the Samaritans. (08457 909090) <http://www.samaritans.org/>
- using similar techniques to people struggling with stopping (see section below and full website feature), eg
  - support
  - trying to minimise stress wherever possible
  - having a portfolio of absorbing diversion techniques (or even just one that works for you)
  - rewards

### *Things that might not help*

As we mentioned above, learning more about self-harming can be precisely, and dangerously, that. It is very easy to extend our portfolio of self inflicted violence, and our repertoire of justifications, by finding out what others do to hurt themselves. So at this early stage, in particular, it's often much safer and more constructive to get information and advice from broader mental health sources such as Mind ([www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)) rather than from specific self-harm resources.

## For people who self-harm

### *The best resources*

There's nothing we can really add to existing resources, which generally include advice and support about reducing the physical risks while self-harming, and ways of managing to stop self-harming. The most valuable resources are listed above.

### *Preparing for eventually reducing or stopping self-harming*

The *Stages of Change* model researched and constructed by Prochaska and others, describes the processes that people go through to achieve behavioural change, particularly in relation to health habits - smoking, drinking etc. It's an interesting model, based on the findings of how thousands of people managed without professional help to free themselves from addictions and other ingrained behavioural patterns. The book *Changing for Good* sets out in a very clear way the systematic processes which create these huge changes.

The importance of this model is that there are 5 very distinct stages in the process of change, and we need to recognise and respond to the particular stage we're in. The stages are:

1. *pre-contemplation* - when we don't realise there's a problem, let alone what the solution might be
2. *contemplation* - we start to think about changing the habit, but are still very ambivalent
3. *preparation* - OK - we're serious now! We've made the decision to kick whatever unhealthy stuff we're doing, and are making realistic, careful plans for how to achieve this
4. *action* - yup - action. Doing it. No putting it off but getting stuck into improving our lives by losing the crap that's impeding us.
5. *maintenance* - the real challenge! Sticking to it for years, for ever. Too tough to imagine in the early, day, or hour at a time stages, but it's heartening to read all the stories about those who have achieved this.

Recognising these stages, and where we are in relation to them, can be incredibly helpful in being able to move towards stopping self-harming. It can, for example, be tempting one day to galvanise enough emotional strength to impulsively decide to stop. "That's it. It's doing too much damage. It can only get worse and harder to stop. It will be hard but somehow I'll do it." Etc etc. The trouble with relatively spontaneous, or certainly under-prepared decisions to stop is that they're unlikely to succeed or be sustainable. It really is preferable to move from contemplating change to actively and thoroughly preparing for it. By identifying which stage of change we're in, we're much, much more likely to be successful in achieving this.

### *If you get the chance to prepare for stressful situations*

Sometimes it is possible to anticipate particularly stressful events (whether it's going to the dentist or to a fractious relative). And if you can anticipate these times, you might be able to work out a way of minimising its impact on you, by looking at the situation in a broader context than usual. It can be very reassuring to remember, for example, times when we have been able to cope with that or comparable situations. If we can reduce the stress, we're less likely to self-harm. We've produced the *Unsticking Sheet* as a tool for gauging how bad a situation really will be, or has been, providing an opportunity to unstick some possibly unhelpful thoughts or feelings.

### *And for our long-suffering friends and family*

Even the best resources, such as *The Scarred Soul*, can sound patronising or even aggressive about how friends, relatives and others we love should respond to self-harming. As if it's not enough that people who really care about us have to cope with being powerless to stop us inflicting violence on ourselves, without being berated in the process! The mellowest, most constructive information resource we've found for friends and family is the booklet called *For friends and family*. It's one of a series produced by the Bristol Crisis Centre for Women [www.users.zetnet.co.uk/BCSW/](http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/BCSW/)

"Undoubtedly the worst thing for me about my self-harming has been the impact it's had on my partner. It's introduced awful things into our relationship, like concealment, half-truths - and loads of stress. She has been very supportive throughout it all, despite it being such a shock and also so distressing for her."

## **For people contemplating stopping self-harming**

### *Beware of imitations!*

The books *Changing for Good, Women and Self Harm* and *The Scarred Soul* are an invaluable source of information, practical exercises and encouragement. Our one reservation is that some of the 'alternatives' to self-harming (eg using ice or punching pillows) recommended by most sources, including *The Scarred Soul*, actually mimic self-injurious behaviour. From our experience, it's much safer and more sustainable to find absorbing diversions which don't replicate key features of self-harming, if at all possible. The book *Bodily Harm* by Karen Conterio and Wendy Lader sets out very clearly why mimicking activities reinforce rather than dilute self-injuring. Firstly these reinforce the pattern of responding to stress with something self-punitive, albeit in a milder, safer form. And secondly, it delays getting to the ideal stage of being able to express

in words what we're feeling. As with many aspects of self harming, there's a clear parallel with alcoholism: an alcoholic having an alcohol free beer. Not exactly the most helpful way of ridding themselves of an addictive behaviour.

We hope that some of the ideas in the next section are helpful in this crucial stage of planning for the big leap into a non-self-harming future.

"I've done things which are safer versions of self-harming and they can help take the edge off my distress. But as often as not I end up feeling that I may as well have self-harmed and that it's still a really unhealthy way of dealing with my difficult feelings."

## For people who are managing to stop self-harming

*Phew! Well done!*

Firstly, congratulations! Stopping self-harming may well be one of the hardest things we'll ever manage to achieve, because self-harming is such an insidiously effective, and often addictive, short-term 'fix'. It's likely that you've been able to reach this tough, brave stage with the support of friends and family and perhaps professionals as well as one or a hundred coping techniques ranging from aromatherapy to zymurgy. (OK, maybe not that one which is simply the last word in the dictionary. Definitely not the last word in self-harming recovery techniques.)

*Things that might help*

*Daily*

Each day of abstinence is a triumph, and should be celebrated. One cheap and very cheerful way of doing this is to use a particularly attractive calendar which has those squares for writing in, and - well, write in the squares. Or simply fill them in with vibrant colours. Or if you're the winner of the Turner Prize, with spat out pieces of chewing gum.

Many people handle their distress and their self harming by using a daily, or even occasional, journal to write down their feelings. And if not something as Hampstead as a journal, a scruffy notebook, or the lid of an egg carton or the margins of a dull email can also serve as a space to scribble down how we feel. Once again, lots of mental health websites have good info about expressing feelings in writing.

### *Weekly and monthly*

Whatever feels rewarding. Films, schmoozing, music, walking the dog, pondering how nice it is not to have a dog you have to walk... There are loads of examples in the section on Turnaround Techniques.

### *Dealing with scars*

All the good resources have advice about dealing with scars, especially about what to tell people who see them. Perhaps because it hasn't been 'proven' scientifically, there's little profile given to Vitamin E as a way of reducing scars' visibility. It may happen to work very well for you, and is certainly worth trying; the other options are increasingly medical, complicated and costly.

"My cousin, Tricia, told me that her young daughter had badly scarred her back, having tripped and fallen through a glass table. Tricia rubbed the oily contents of Vitamin E capsules into the scar and it completely faded. I was sceptical but thought - hey, I've got nothing to lose and at worst I'll feel like a tossed salad. It turned out that I was lucky and it did make my scars fade much faster than they did when I didn't oil them each day."

### *Turnaround Techniques*

All the effective techniques we use to get us to the stage of being able to survive without self-harming will be needed to sustain this coping, or 'abstinence'. And possibly a whole load of extra tactics. As mentioned above, if it's humanly possible it's much better to avoid doing any 'alternative', or 'diversionary' activity which mimics self-harming.

There's no question that at moments of intense stress it's very very hard not to self-harm, at least in the early stages of ridding ourselves of this addictive behaviour. But we hope that the extent and range of the following ideas does give you one or more options which help. The crucial thing is to find ones that work for you and to have with you at all times any resources you need (pen, paper, puzzle, Play-Doh....) The following ideas inspired our expanded website feature on Turnaround Techniques - pleasurable ways to change perspectives.

With thanks to Heather

# Turnaround Techniques

These ideas are inspired from various expert sources, ranging from (not surprisingly...) websites written by people who self-harm to books on creative thinking for entrepreneurs. The principle is always similar: how to shift from one fixed set of views or feelings in order to come up with fresh perspectives and improved solutions. Many of the following *turnaround techniques* include the benefits of **doing the opposite** and this is probably the most useful concept to hang onto. At its simplest, if you feel crap and you're indoors, doing something outdoors can really help. Or shifting from being active to restful, or vice versa.

Turnaround techniques, a.k.a. 'distraction techniques', are just this. They don't even attempt to begin to address the underlying sources of, or real resolution for distress. But they can really help get us through some particularly ghastly moments. And that's great, just like the much maligned sticking plaster is actually a particularly good idea for bunging on a kid's grazed knee. (Then they can be given the lecture about not texting on their mobile phone while they're cycling to the sweetshop.)

There are of course hundreds of things we can do which might delay or prevent us self-harming. But invariably the very best things to do are:

- to express what we feel, ideally by talking to someone else. Writing things down, or drawing (or scribbling....) our thoughts and feelings can also be very calming
- to cry

We hope that at least some of the following will be of help.

## 1. Thinking

Always available, escaping into distracting thoughts, games and fantasies can be a great way of providing some emotional relief.

- If you were invited onto the Desert Island Discs programme, what music, books, and possessions would you impress the audience with. And which ones would you really like to bring?
- Think about, or write down, what you love about your friends, family, favourite celebrities and pets.
- Do that Parisian boulevard, sitting outside a café, thing - people watching. Watch them wherever you happen to be - at a bus stop, walking down the high street, sitting in a PTA meeting .... Think about

what they're wearing (is it like so last season?), how they're walking (not surprising with shoes/jeans/a dog like that), what their job might be (tattoo artist? croupier? embalmer?)

- Do a mental maths puzzle, like counting backwards in 3s from 100 or 1000 (or on a bad day, 10. On a very good day, try it in 7s).
- Or those old favourite letter puzzles, used over the decades to parry the car cry of 'are we nearly there yet?' - eg finding the name of an animal, plant, flower, type of food or country for each letter of the alphabet
- Choose an object in the room. Examine it carefully and then write as detailed a description of it as you can, as if you were describing it to a blind person. Include everything: size, weight, texture, shape, colour, possible uses, feel, how light falls on it etc.
- Pick an object, like a glass or a tube of toothpaste, and try to list 20 different uses for it.
- Escape! Wherever you want to go, it's only a second away when it's in your imagination - the Costa Rican rainforest, a Zen retreat, anywhere at all in Las Vegas, a Jamaican beach. Or escape upwards by paragliding, curling up in a treehouse, hot air ballooning...

## Websites

[www.puzzles.com](http://www.puzzles.com)

[www.momsminivan.com](http://www.momsminivan.com)

[www.treehouse-company.com](http://www.treehouse-company.com)

[www.miniclip.com/fowlwords.htm](http://www.miniclip.com/fowlwords.htm)

## 2. Sensing

Touchy feely, smelly, yummy, noisy or pretty - all helpful absorbing experiences.

- For a totally sensational work-out, and a handy way to add a few inches to your and others' waistlines, cook something quin-sensory. How about making chocolate pastry? You'll obviously get the joys of touch, sight and smell, plus sound (OK, a bit of a stretch this one, but imagine the sound of pastry ricocheting off the sides of the bowl) and of course taste.
- Go into your food cupboard or fridge and smell lots of different foods. Things like vanilla, chocolate, coffee, herbs, and lemon are particularly fab.
- Rummage through your clothes, or clothes in a shop, with your hands rather than your eyes, feeling the difference between cotton, wool, silk, leather....
- Instead of window-shopping, go nasal shopping in these sorts of stores:

- Asian, Greek, Chinese and other great-smelling food shops
- body pampering stores (Body Shop etc)
- pet stores (possibly a more mixed olfactory experience, especially if you get too close to some of the reptiles. Or hamsters.)
- If it's hard to shake off the smell of iguana, try buying a delicious bunch of mimosa and (unlike Bill Clinton) inhale
- Take a hot bath - and ratchet the sensory experience up to all 5 senses if you nibble while you soak
- Really notice everything you can see around you, as if you were going to draw it. (Even better, whip out a pencil and paper and draw it!) Describe in your mind, or on paper, features like colour, the effect of light and dark, textures, shapes, contrast, people's interesting physical characteristics etc
- A less taxing version of this is simply to count the colours you can see.

## Websites

Surround yourself with sounds natural and less so -  
[www.naturesongs.com](http://www.naturesongs.com)

Although this is a site about textures, it's also a great sight site:  
[www.3dcafe.com](http://www.3dcafe.com)

## 3. Reading and writing

We're not talking about ploughing through Sartre or attempting to write a blockbuster novel, but mellow dipping into some reading treats and scribbling down whatever pops into your head.

- Buy a gorgeous journal, like the ones Paperchase sells, hand-made in Nepal. Write down absolutely anything - how you feel right now, your Fantasy Frisbee team, the first and last lines of a novel (it doesn't have to be a blockbuster, nor have anything between the first and last lines....)
- Read about something you know nothing about. Browsing magazines in a newsagents can reveal whole new worlds, from body-building to train-spotting. (And they say people who self-harm have problems...)
- Open the dictionary in random places and learn new words.
- If kids can watch the Finding Nemo video a zillion times, it's perfectly reasonable for us to lose ourselves in our favourite novel again. And again.

- Spend a few hours gazing through catalogues of your favourite retail fantasy. Ours include stationery (little more satisfying in life than a slow browse through the Viking catalogue) and cabin baggage.
- Dip into really easy, funny books. We'd recommend:
  - *The Puffin Book of Nonsense Verse* edited by Quentin Blake
  - *101 Unuseless Japanese Inventions* - Kenji Kawakami
  - *Really Important Stuff My Kids Have Taught Me* - Cynthia Copeland Lewis

## Websites

[www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

[www.bbc.co.uk/learning/coursesearch/bigread/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/coursesearch/bigread/)

One of the next best things to exotic travel - essential and, particularly fabulously, inessential travel gear

[www.magellans.co.uk](http://www.magellans.co.uk)

## 4. Playing

Bit of an overlap with 'mental', but needing a trip to Smiths, the back of the kids' toy cupboards or (best of all), a leisurely spree on the websites of Hawkins Bazaar and its sister company Tobar. Equip yourself with:

- word game books
- hand-held puzzles like Rubik's cube and that little plastic thing where one tile is missing and you shuffle the others around to spell out the first line of *Hard Times* or to reconfigure a nuclear power station
- ridiculous desk games like:
  - micro-croquet
  - tiddlywinks
  - 10 pin bowling
- a ball to bounce - or 3 to juggle
- a dart board - perhaps one of those nice safe magnetic or Velcro ones if there are kids, pets or colleagues at risk from rogue throws

## Websites

[www.hawkin.com](http://www.hawkin.com)

[www.tobar.co.uk](http://www.tobar.co.uk)

[www.puzzles.com/PuzzlePlayground/WelcomeToPuzzlePlayground.htm](http://www.puzzles.com/PuzzlePlayground/WelcomeToPuzzlePlayground.htm)

## 5. Computing

This deserves a website, a gallery, a city all of its own. But in the meantime, here are some obvious and a few slightly more obscure ideas.

- Fun websites - ones that are funny, surprising, and especially those that are interactive - i.e. visitors have to get actively involved with them, eg because there are games, quizzes etc.
- Computer games, including handheld computer games - latest Gameboy etc
- Pick a subject, find websites about it and chose 10 amazing things about it to tell other people
- Really surf - wander aimlessly from site to site using links, links from links, links from links from etc etc
- Or wander slightly less aimlessly by specific topics, perhaps inspired by things on your desk - wood, files, pictures, half-chewed bars of chocolate...

## Websites

Undoubtedly the best website of all time. Featuring Must Haves such as a Lick-O-Meter keychain which counts how many licks you've had on the inserted lollipop.

<http://www.stupid.com/index.html>

Great games inc. online jigsaws, word games and strange videos if you have high-powered fancy software stuff [www.shockwave.com](http://www.shockwave.com)

Exquisitely satisfying - bursting bubble-wrap on-line, complete with authentic popping noises

[www.virtual-bubblewrap.com/popnow.shtml](http://www.virtual-bubblewrap.com/popnow.shtml)

## 6. Eating

Gaze at it, feel it, buy it, draw it, photograph it, talk about it, write about it. Oh, and eat it. No big surprises in this list:

- Recipe books
- Cooking
- Shops:
  - cooking equipment
  - supermarkets, bakers etc
- Foody mags

## Websites

Work up a stonking appetite and feed your conscience:

[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources\\_recipes.htm](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources_recipes.htm)

Or just drool over the pictures in:

[www.waitrose.com/wfi/](http://www.waitrose.com/wfi/)

## 7. Creating

There are so many lovely things that we can fiddle with, sculpt, draw, paint and generally make a mess with.

- Getting stuck into kids' things like Wikkistix (sticky pipecleaner type things), Play-doh or even better, the edible version - sugar paste
- activities you might normally dismiss as too naff but which can be deeply engrossing:
  - sewing
  - knitting
  - origami
  - painting, drawing - even colouring in
- playing some kind of musical instrument. Even if you don't really know how to play, picking out tunes is a way to concentrate and help get rid of the urge to harm yourself.
- taking photographs. Absolutely don't worry about the end result, and play around with taking photos of:
  - small parts of objects (eg of street furniture, flowers, clothes, luggage....)
  - light and shade
  - splashes of colour
  - the shapes that groups of people make
- and then... sorting photos, into albums, shoe boxes, sides of sofas etc
- and if that's too daunting, dust off the old albums and have a nostalgic hour or two with them

## Websites

All things crafty:

[www.johnsoncrafts.co.uk](http://www.johnsoncrafts.co.uk)

Colouring-in books for grown-ups:

[www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/026-7712927-3632400](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/026-7712927-3632400)

Make a pelican or publican out of Origami.

[www.paperfolding.com](http://www.paperfolding.com)

## 8. Connecting

Best thing, of course, is to be with people. Ideally people we love and we feel totally safe with. Hugging is a powerfully calming and heartening thing to do and if it's with someone you know, it won't result in getting arrested.

It's really tempting, and sometimes essential or unavoidable to be by ourselves when we're feeling at our worst. If relaxed schmoozing the time-honoured way isn't right or possible, there are now all sorts of 'indirect' ways of being in touch with people

- Writing letters
- Emailing
- Chat rooms
- Texting

And connecting doesn't have to be only with humans. Animals can be profoundly comforting, energising, amusing, stimulating....

## Websites

[www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)

[www.zoowatch.freereserve.co.uk](http://www.zoowatch.freereserve.co.uk)

[www.petsastherapy.org](http://www.petsastherapy.org)

## 9. Switching on

So much choice, so little time!

- Listen to your favourite music
- Watch your favourite video
- Conversely, watch a TV programme, or channel, that you would put last, or second to last, on your list of favourites
- Flick through TV channels (mainly if you've got non-terrestrial, else you'll be a bit unsatisfied after a mere 4 flicks!)

### Websites

[www.radiotimes.com](http://www.radiotimes.com)

[www.digitalspy.co.uk/tv/listings](http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/tv/listings)

## 10. Switching off

Chilling out has shifted from being the monopoly of mountain-dwelling gurus to being as mainstream as the Simpsons. Even Homer might have tried one of these:

- Day dreaming
- Visualising
- Deep breathing
- Meditating
- Yoga

### Websites

[www.calmcentre.com](http://www.calmcentre.com)

[www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/nakedscience/stress/coping.asp](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/nakedscience/stress/coping.asp)

[www.yogauk.com](http://www.yogauk.com)

# 11. Moving

When things are really grim, it can be a real effort to reach for the remote control just in time to avoid yet another programme about a family starting a new life in Tuscany or Tobago. But all the books and many of the people say that exercise is a crucial element of recovering one's mental health. Personally I've found that little beats stretching out with a few select pralines and a Will and Grace video. But the official line is that it's highly beneficial to try:

- exercising:
  - aerobics
  - badminton
  - basketball
  - cricket
  - cycling
  - dance
  - fencing
  - football
  - hockey
  - martial arts
  - netball
  - running
  - squash
  - swimming
  - table tennis
  - tennis
  - volleyball
  - walking
  - yoga
  
- Visiting a street or building you've never visited before, within a 10 minute walk of your home or place of work
- sorting out & clean drawers, cupboards

## Websites

[www.bbc.co.uk/health/fitness](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/fitness)

[www.menshealth.co.uk](http://www.menshealth.co.uk)

[www.visitbritain.com/world/home4.asp](http://www.visitbritain.com/world/home4.asp)

## 12. Laughing

Five A Day applies not only to fruit and veg but to the absolute requirement of 5 lots of convulsive laughter a day. Any of the following ideas should help, although a good schmooze with friends will generally do the trick.

- Anything by Nick Page - his website ([www.nickpage.co.uk](http://www.nickpage.co.uk)) , his books (In Search of the Worlds' Worst Writers; The Tabloid Bible; The Tabloid Shakespeare) - and if you're particularly lucky, his emails, contributions to meetings, leaflets, radio scripts.....
- Going to a comedy club, funny film, funny play, funny musical
- Lovely potentially everyday funny experiences - sit coms, favourite videos, cartoon strips in the newspaper
- Funny books - not just Nick's but other joyously hilarious treats, such as those by Sheila Heyman, Tony Hawks, Danny Wallace and those magnificently off-beat cartoons by Gary Larson

### Websites

[www.nickpage.co.uk](http://www.nickpage.co.uk)

[www.dilbert.com/](http://www.dilbert.com/)

<http://www.join-me.co.uk/>

[www.pythonline.com](http://www.pythonline.com)