

Cognitive-behavioural therapy for a variety of conditions: an overview of systematic reviews and panoramic meta-analysis

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Plain English summary

CBT for a variety of conditions

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Plain English summary

This report is a summary of research examining if a psychological therapy called cognitive-behavioural therapy can improve the quality of life of people living with physical and/or mental conditions. Cognitive-behavioural therapy uses a set of techniques that help individuals to identify and change problematic thoughts or behaviour patterns that might contribute to and maintain their physical or mental symptoms. It can be delivered face to face or through mediums such as the internet. We aimed to understand if cognitive-behavioural therapy helps patients with specific conditions only, or if it can help patients with any condition.

We searched relevant databases to find articles that combine the results from multiple trials testing cognitive-behavioural therapy. These are known as systematic reviews. We graded these reviews as providing good- or poor-quality evidence. We identified the conditions for which we had good-quality evidence on whether or not cognitive-behavioural therapy was helpful.

From each review, we took numerical data that told us if cognitive-behavioural therapy improved quality of life for that specific condition. Next, we combined all the numerical data together, across all the conditions, to see if there was a consistent benefit of cognitive-behavioural therapy.

The statistical analyses found that cognitive-behavioural therapy consistently improved quality of life across all the conditions where it has been tested. We have evidence that it can help children, adolescents and adults, of either sex, who are living in Europe, North America and Australasia. We are unsure if it will help older adults or people living in Africa, Asia or South America, nor do we know if cognitive-behavioural therapy is equally effective across different ethnic groups.

It is recommended that future research should prioritise understanding how cognitive-behavioural therapy works, why some people do not want to use cognitive-behavioural therapy and why some patients do not benefit from it.

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This report

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