

Fact: It can happen once, or many times

Some people attempt suicide or hurt themselves just once or twice. Other people use self-harm to cope over a long time. They might hurt themselves quite often during a bad patch.

Fact: People do stop self-harming

Many people stop self-harming - when they're ready. They sort their problems out and find other ways of dealing with their feelings. It might take a long time and they might need help. But things can get better.

What can I do?

If you are worried about self-harm you can get help. Self-harm is often a way of coping with painful experiences. These might include being abused or neglected, losing someone important to you, being bullied, harassed or assaulted, or being very lonely and isolated. If you can find different ways of coping with how you feel and what has happened to you, you will probably self-harm less and less, and eventually stop hurting yourself in this way. It can help to tell someone supportive about painful things that have happened to you and the ways these have made you feel. You could find out about counselling and support in your area from your library, Citizen's Advice Bureau or MIND.

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Self-harm – staying safe

Why bother?

Just because you hurt yourself doesn't mean your safety and your health don't matter. You do matter. That's why it's important to keep the damage to the minimum. You deserve to take the best care of yourself you can, while you're self-harming.

Damage limitation

- Don't mix self-harm with alcohol or drugs or you might go further than you meant to.
- Get a tetanus jab and a booster every 10 years.
- Use only clean things to cut, and don't share.
- Don't assume that over-the-counter drugs aren't dangerous. You can still die of a small overdose, especially of paracetamol.
- Try to get through and survive until the next day, when you may feel differently.
- If you're really wound-up and likely to do something drastic, get yourself away from things you can hurt yourself with. Try to be with people.

Need advice?

If you are worried about something you have done to yourself or are not sure what to do, ask a pharmacist (at the chemist's) for advice, or ring Accident and Emergency or the Doctor or nurse at your GP surgery.

Taking care of yourself

- ✘ Clean cuts gently and put on a dry, clean, non-stick dressing, or use 'steristrips' to close the wound.
- ✘ Cool burns with cold water. (The injury can keep getting worse even after you've stopped burning. It's worth cooling for up to half an hour.) Then put on anti-inflammatory cream or dressing.
- ✘ Treat yourself kindly and calmly - you've had a shock. Rest and comfort yourself.

The danger zone

Get medical help quickly for:

- ✘ Cuts that are deep or wide
- ✘ Bleeding that spurts or won't stop
- ✘ Burns or scalds bigger than a 50p
- ✘ Infection - area red, hot, swollen or oozing pus
- ✘ Overdoses and poisons

Scared to go to accident & emergency?

Take a friend or supporter. Be polite, try to stay calm, but stick up for yourself. You have the right to decent treatment.

Self-harm: the facts

Fact: Self-harm isn't necessarily about suicide

Sometimes people harm themselves because they want to die. But often it's more about staying alive. People may hurt themselves to help them get through a bad time. It's a way to cope.

Fact: People self-harm in different ways

Some cut their arms or legs; others bang or bruise their bodies. Self-harm also includes burning, scratching, hair-pulling, scrubbing - anything that causes injury to the body. Some people take tablets, perhaps not a big overdose, but enough to blot things out for a while.

Fact: It doesn't mean you're off your head

All sorts of people self-harm - even people in high-powered jobs. It's a sign that something is hurting and upsetting you, not that you are mad.

Fact: Lots of people self-harm

You may not have met anyone else who self harms and may even think you are the only one who does it. There's a lot of secrecy about self-harm. But many thousands of people try and cope with life.

Fact: It's not 'just attention-seeking'

People self-harm because they are in pain and trying to cope. They might also be trying to reveal that something is wrong. They need to be taken seriously.