

# Self-help

for inmates

SIFER



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## About self-help

*This booklet is designed for people in prison. Here you can read about mental health and receive advice on how to take care of yourself, during your time in custody.*

Good mental health means feeling good and being able to cope with adversity in everyday life. It is important to remember that everyone can have a hard time now and then. Nobody feels great all the time. Being sad, anxious or having trouble sleeping is somewhat everyone experiences from time to time

Sometimes such problems can become so big and last so long that it can be called a mental disorder. Then, you might feel unwell most of the time and the pain can prevent you from doing things you like, or make it hard for you to be with others. If this happens, you should seek help to get better.

But there is still a lot you can do yourself to influence your mental health in a positive way! That is exactly what this booklet is about, in other words ***what you can do yourself to feel better.***  
This is what we call ***self-help.***

## Self-help is simple, but not easy!

You can't just do an exercise once and expect a great result. Strengthening your mental health works in the same way as exercising your body – *the more often you exercise, the better the effect.*

In this booklet you will find some advice that you might find helpful, as well as other tips that you might not consider helpful. Remember that trying a little is better than nothing. You have little to lose by trying some of the advice in the booklet. So: Don't think about whether you want to or don't want to - **try** the advice that might suit you, and try it several times.

If you find it difficult to get started using the booklet, you can ask one of the prison staff for help.



# Mental health in prison

*Being in prison is hard. Many feel sadness, anger and despair.*

It is normal to feel insecure at first. The most typical questions inmates have are: *What happens now?* *What is my life going to be like going forward?*

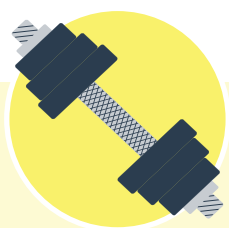
Many feel alone and far away from family and friends. It can be difficult to think about those who lives on the outside. Some people find it easier to have little contact with their loved ones during their time in custody. Whereas others think that their ways of keeping in touch are too limited.

It is common to experience that the horrible and difficult things from earlier in your life, comes back to you with full force when you go to prison.

Some struggle with feelings of being treated unfairly by the legal system and quite a few convicts are very worried about the future.

The first time in prison will often be characterised by mental chaos and great frustration. Even if your situation feels hopeless now - **remember there's hope!** For most people, things will calm down with time.

*The best advice from ex-prisoners is to try to make something out of your time in custody.* Just thinking you're "in storage" all the time can make things worse.



## Be physically active

Being physically active is good for the body and makes you feel good.

Work out in the exercise area or in you room. All kinds of physical activity are good.



## Be sociable

Everyone has a need for contact with others. It gives a feeling of belonging and being important.

Ask if anyone wants to play games, exercise or go to the outdoor yard. Call or arrange for a video call to connect with some-one on the outside.



## Learn new things

Learning new things is enjoyable and gives you a sense of achievement.

You can learn a new game, a new language, a new recipe, how to draw or play an instrument.



# Take care of yourself

*Physical activity and a healthy diet are important for your physical and mental health.*

Many inmates find that exercise is a good way to pass the time. When it comes to diet, some prisons will have better offerings than others. However, try to follow these tips as best you can. Remember that small improvements in physical activity and diet are good for your health.



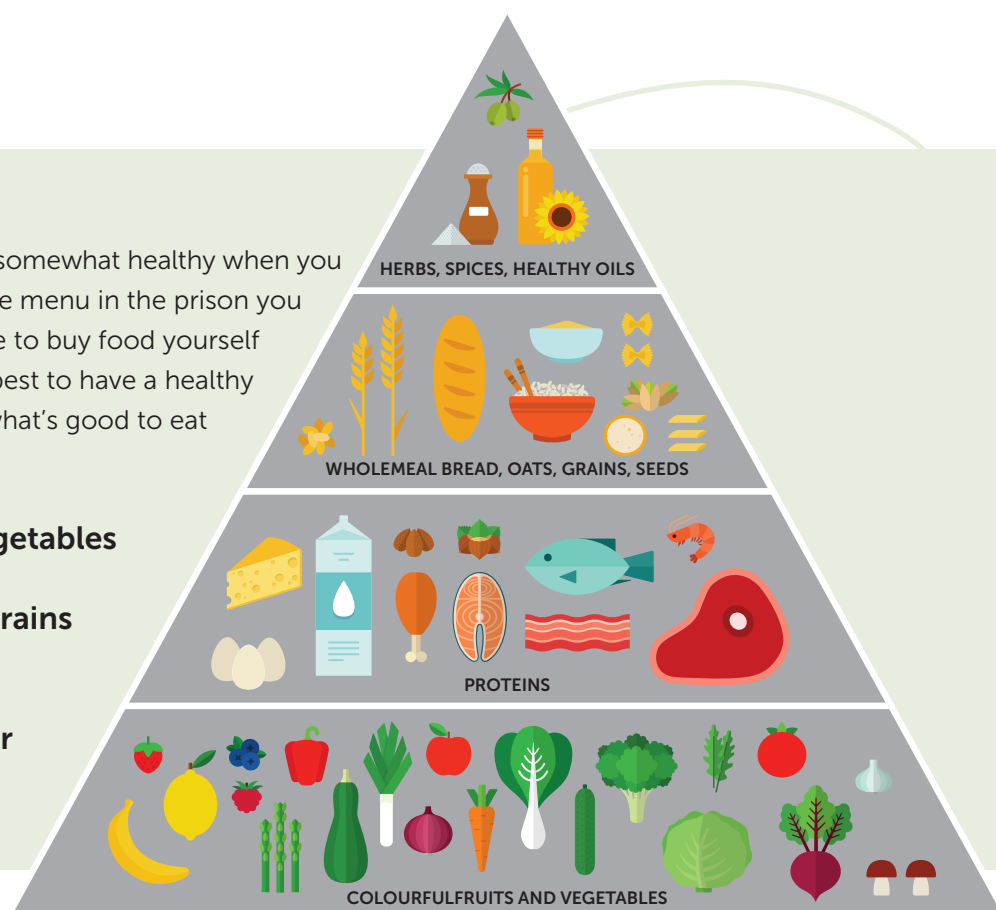
In the case of physical activity, not much is needed. Half an hour a day is good, but remember that all activity counts. The level of exercise is not so important, the most important thing is that you get moving:

- **Strength training in the gym**
- **Run or walk in the outdoor yard**
- **Do exercises in your room, such as abdominal exercises, squats and push-ups**
- **Play football, do yoga or take part in other group exercise in the prison**

## Healthy diet

It can seem impossible to eat somewhat healthy when you are in prison. If the food on the menu in the prison you are in is poor, you may be able to buy food yourself or join a food team. Do your best to have a healthy and varied diet. You can see what's good to eat and drink in the picture here.

- **As much fruit and vegetables as possible**
- **Proteins and whole grains for most meals**
- **Drink lots of water**
- **Avoid too much sugar and caffeine**





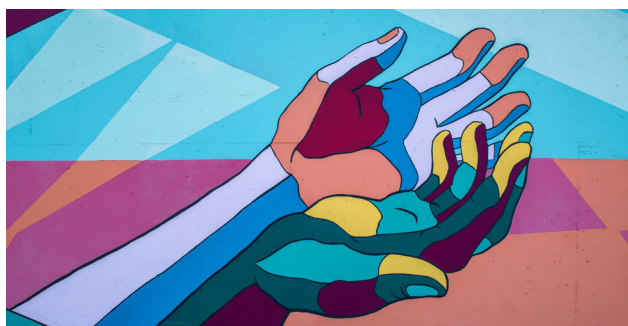
# Contact with and support from others

*Contact with and support from others is important. It makes us feel more secure, happier and gives us a sense of belonging.*

This can be family, friends, acquaintances or people you meet through different interests and activities.

**It may include:**

- someone to talk with about common and difficult things
- someone we can enjoy things together with
- someone who can help us with practical things
- someone who can give advice when we wonder about something



It can be challenging to find someone you can trust in prison. Maybe you don't want to share your personal thoughts with just anyone. Some also find it difficult to ask about things or ask for help.

Exploring different approaches to social interactions during your time in custody is crucial.

*Isolation is not good for the psyche*

It is not unusual that the other inmates have other interests than yourself. Maybe playing games, watching a movie or cooking with someone can work, even if you don't communicate much. *Most people find companionship with others in the unit after some time.*

## Do more of what makes you happy

your best to steer clear of people or situations that make you frustrated or sad. Spend time and have more contact with people and activities that give you positive feelings. Try to find ways that will strengthen your well-being. Perhaps you can also be of support to other inmates?

**Doing something good for others  
gives you a sense of self-worth**

**Jonas!**

**What's up?  
Coming to the yard?**

*«I noticed that Jonas had started to isolate himself. I knew something was wrong when he stopped going outside. He barely left his room. I wrote him a note with a message. It worked, and it made me feel good.»*



# Write a letter

## *How to write a letter to someone on the outside?*

Many inmates think they have nothing to write about, but that's not true. Here are some tips on what you can write in a letter:

- **how you are**
- **feelings that you have frequently**
- **something you normally think about**
- **what you are looking forward to when you get out**

**Ask questions - it increases the chance that you will receive a letter back.**

Use plenty of time so that you really get down what's on your mind.

Hi Berit  
How are you?  
Thank you for the socks you sent! It's a bit up and down her for me. There's so much I miss...  
The good thing is that I'm going to be able to start school. It will be nice to have something to do during the day. At the weekend, I'm going to make tacos with my cooking team. Trying to hold on to some things while I'm in here.

Speak soon!

REGARDS M.



## **How to write a letter to a child?**

If you are going to write a letter to a child, you should hold back on describing difficult things and strong emotions such as regret, anger, sadness and frustration. Here are some tips on what a letter can contain:

- **Give a description of your room or of your everyday life.**
- **If you have made new friends or acquaintances, you can tell them about that.**
- **Try to goof around a little and remove the scary thoughts children might have about prison.**
- **Don't make promises you can't keep - even if what you promise seems very likely and desirable at the moment.**
- **Be creative. Make a drawing or cut out pictures and letters from the newspaper.**

## **Ask questions - show interest in the child**

Which Saturday treat are you going to have?

What's the funniest thing that has happened recently?

Who did you play against last? What was the score?

## **Write a letter to yourself**

If you write a letter in a difficult moment, the person reading the letter may think that you have a hard time all the time. The reader may become sad and feel powerless. One tip is if you see that the letter you write becomes very gloomy, you can write it to yourself. You don't need to post it, just keep it or throw it away when you're done.



# Notice the good things

*Life consists of both ups and downs.*

When you are under negative stress, we humans remember things that go badly more easily. Most of us need to practice remembering the good things that happens and have happened in our lives.

These two exercises can help you become a little better at it, also they can be done several times a week.



## 1. Try to think of three good things that happened during the day today

NB! It can be difficult to remember good things that have happened during a monotonous prison routine. But try your best to look for small rays of light.



Example:

- A nice phone call
- Winning at cards
- Being granted leave
- Reading something funny in the newspaper

## 2. Try to think of positive experiences from your life



Think of a time when you were very happy.



Think of a time when you did something good for others.



Think of something you are grateful for.



Think of a time when you were brave.



Think of a time when you made a good decision.



Think of something nice someone said to you.



# Relaxation exercises

*Most people can feel tense or stressed at times*

This could be because of worries, strong feelings, difficult things that happened in life or just a bad habit.



Over time this can become a reflex and cause, for example, **headaches, fatigue, difficulty sleeping and restlessness**. Some may experience pain in the jaw, neck, shoulders and back.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

There are numerous exercises you can do to relax and make your body feel better. A breathing exercise can have a relaxing and calming effect, while muscle relaxation can help reduce restlessness and tension in the body. Both can also be used to calm thoughts and emotions.

Here are some suggestions for exercises that can help you when you need it. You should practice them regularly, even when you feel calm, so that they can be used effectively in situations where they are needed.

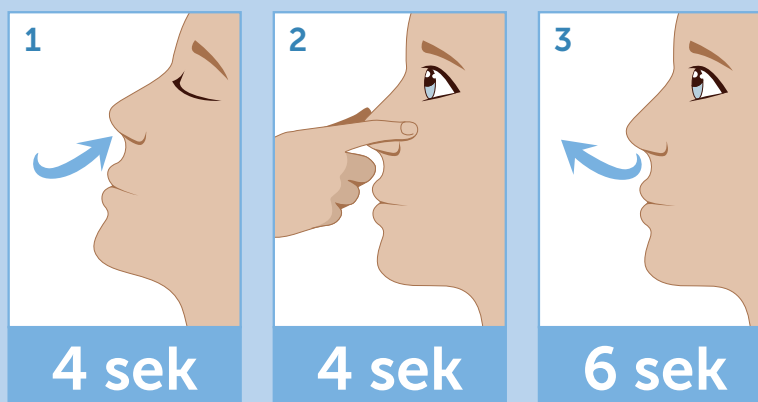
### Breathing exercises

A breathing exercise can consist of breathing in, holding your breath a little and exhaling a little more slowly. The most important thing is that the exhalation is longer than the inhalation.

#### Breathing exercise:

1. Breathe in and count to four
2. Hold your breath and count to four
3. Exhale and count to six

Repeat the exercise 4 times.

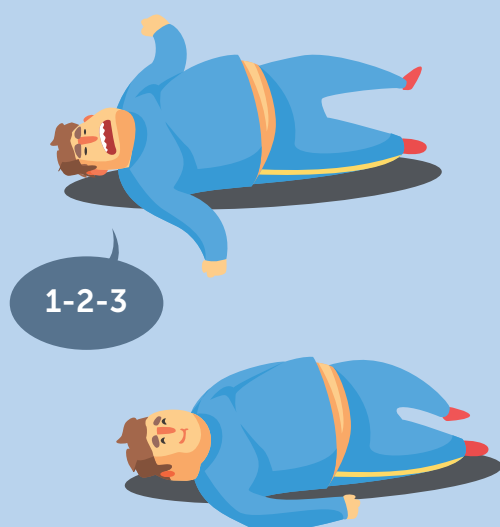
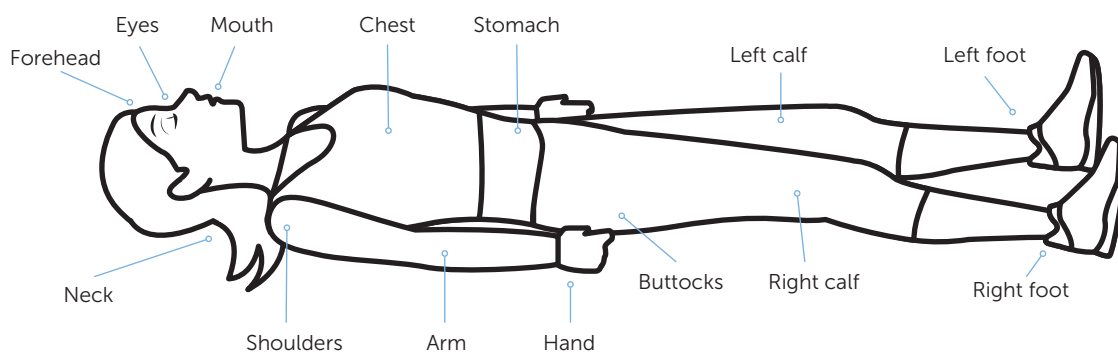




## Muscle relaxation

Muscle relaxation means tensing the muscles in the body and then relaxing the muscles again.

- Tense the muscles of the **right foot** for 5 seconds. Relax for 15 seconds.
- Tense the muscles of the **left foot** for 5 seconds. Relax for 15 seconds.
- 
- Tense the muscles of the **right thigh** for 5 seconds. Relax for 15 seconds.
- 
- Tense the muscles of the **left thigh** for 5 seconds. Relax for 15 seconds.
- 
- Continue like this until you have gone through **all the muscle groups** in your body (see photo).



## Another variation is «Spaghetti Body»

1. Lie down on the floor or in bed in your room
2. Tense your whole body to be as stiff as uncooked spaghetti
3. Count to 3
4. Relax! Let your body go as limp as cooked spaghetti

What feels best? Being stiff like uncooked spaghetti or limp like cooked spaghetti?  
Repeat the exercise three times.

# Rumination and racing thoughts

*Ruminating is something most people do now and again.*

When you are in prison there is a lot of downtime that can give room to heavy thoughts and excessive rumination. Many people think it is useful to brood and that you can understand yourself better. But the truth is that rumination only reinforces the negative in an already difficult situation.

Rumination typically involves thinking a lot about the same things without coming to a solution.



**Rumination and racing thoughts can be very exhausting over time, and can lead to us not feeling well.**



*Racing thoughts is a slightly different variant that is characterised by having many, many thoughts at the same time.*

It can feel like thoughts are racing through your head like a train.

Many people who have racing thoughts become restless and find it difficult to concentrate on anything.

**Most people will try hard not to think so much. But what happens then:  
You just think even more.**

It's better if you **accept** that the thoughts are there. Leave them in the background and don't spend a lot of energy doing anything about them. You'll eventually notice that it can get easier to let go of your thoughts.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

Rumination and racing thoughts can be very exhausting over time. Here are some suggestions for exercises that can help you tackle them. Try to find the exercise(s) that are right for you. You should practice some of the exercises regularly, so that they can be used effectively in situations where they are needed.

### Look at your thoughts from the outside

The next time you feel distressing thoughts pop into your head, try to look at your thoughts from the outside.

**Imagine that your thoughts are clouds floating across the sky.**

Imagine that your thoughts are inside the clouds. Accept that they are there, but at the same time try to leave them alone.

Imagine them just passing you by.

However, sometimes you will find that the negative thoughts remain, and everything can seem sad and hopeless. Next time this happens, write down your negative thoughts. These could be negative thoughts about yourself or worries you have. Try to get everything down on paper.

### Then you can try doing one or both of these exercises:

1. **Sing out the thoughts you have written down to a familiar tune, for example «Happy Birthday to You» or «Mary had a little lamb».** You don't have to sing loudly, you can whisper too.
2. **Read your thoughts out loud in different voices or dialects.** For example, try with a high-pitched voice or a different dialect (those from England can try Scottish, etc).

### You can repeat these exercises several times.

Notice that you get more distance from your thoughts when you read them out loud or sing them repeatedly. Perhaps you notice how little the words really mean?

### Remind yourself that negative thoughts and worries are not the truth.

It is common to experience the thoughts becoming a little less troublesome when doing these exercises.

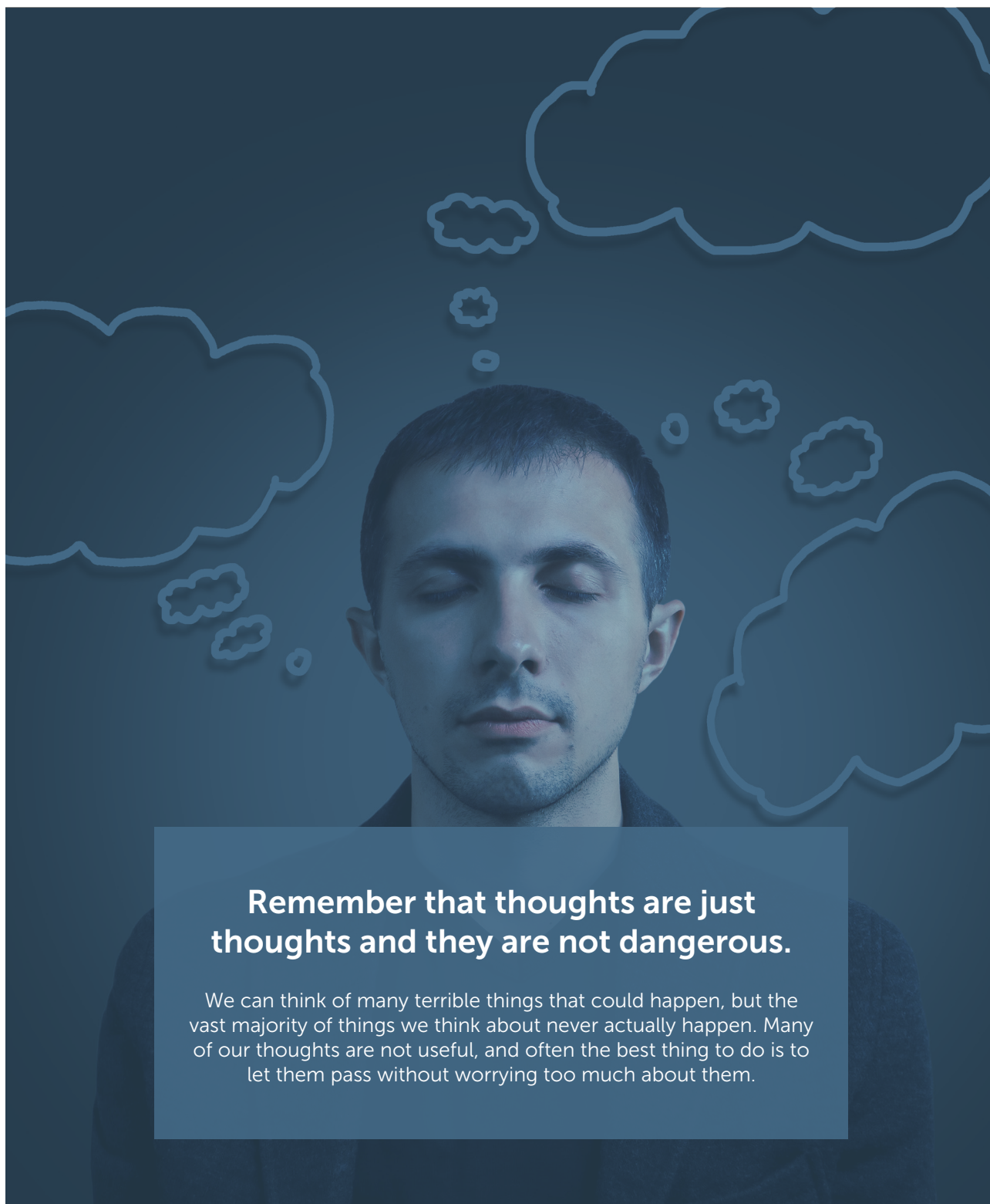


## Accept it

One way to move forward is to decide to accept that you are in a difficult situation. It might be difficult, but practice saying to yourself *«I just have to accept that things are the way they are right now»*. Accepting that you are having a hard time can actually make it feel easier and give you new strength.



Try to imagine yourself pressing the green **ACCEPT** button. Hold it in if necessary!



### **Remember that thoughts are just thoughts and they are not dangerous.**

We can think of many terrible things that could happen, but the vast majority of things we think about never actually happen. Many of our thoughts are not useful, and often the best thing to do is to let them pass without worrying too much about them.



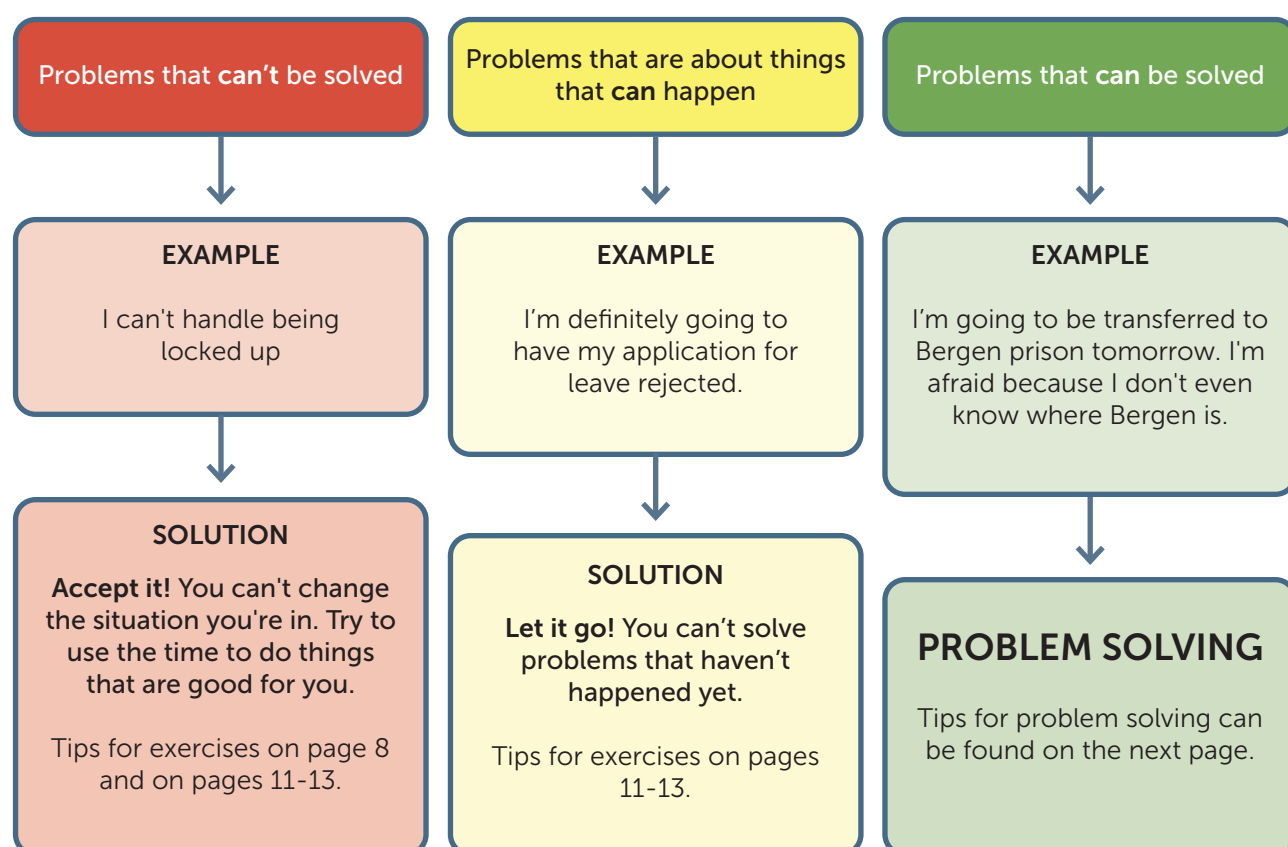
# Problem solving

*Worries and problems are something that all people experience.*

Many inmates feel extremely worried and uncertain about the future. It can be very frustrating not being able to do anything about it.

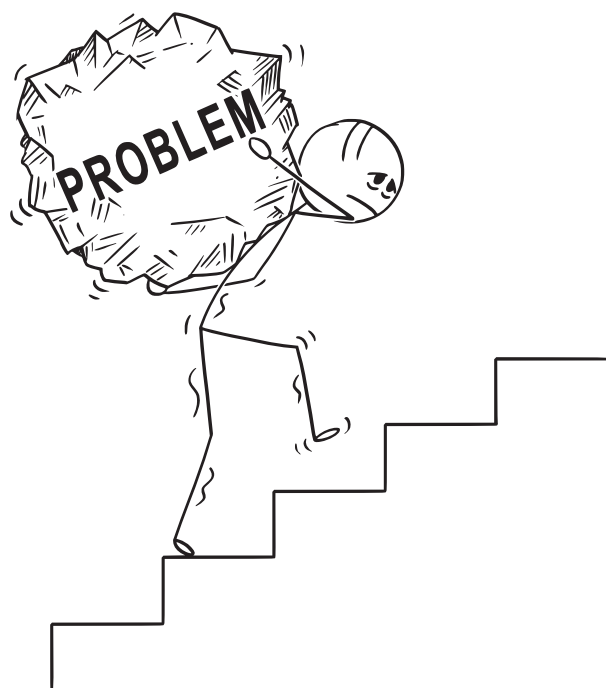


Before you can take action, you must first distinguish between the different types of problems that exist.



Many people find writing lists, a journal or a diary is a good way to unravel the chaos in their heads. Some experience gaining perspective and perhaps a new insight into their problems.

## Useful steps for problem solving



### 1. What is the problem?

Write down the problem. Be as specific as possible. If the problem lies in the future (for example after being released) you can write the date on it.

### 2. What is my goal?

Think about and describe the specific goal you want to achieve by solving the problem.

### 3. What can I do myself?

Write down what you can do that will help. Think about what has been useful for you in similar situations in the past, and what would you advise others to do in the same situation?

### 4. Who can help me?

Name a person you enjoy talking with and who can support you. It could be a friend, fellow inmate, re-entry coordinator, officer or you can ask for help from a priest, nurse or an organisation. Dare to ask the ones you want to.

A photograph of a person's legs in blue jeans and brown shoes, standing on a grey floor with a large white arrow pointing forward. The person is standing with their feet slightly apart, and the arrow is centered in front of them, pointing towards the top of the frame. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

*Example:*

- 1. I'm going to be transferred to Bergen prison next month. I don't want that. I've never even been to Bergen.*
- 2. The goal is that I don't end up worse off than I am now.*
- 3. I need to talk with someone who might have some knowledge about this. I need information about Bergen Prison.*
- 4. I can talk with my contact officer or I can send a call note to the re-entry coordinator. Maybe I can talk with Stian?*

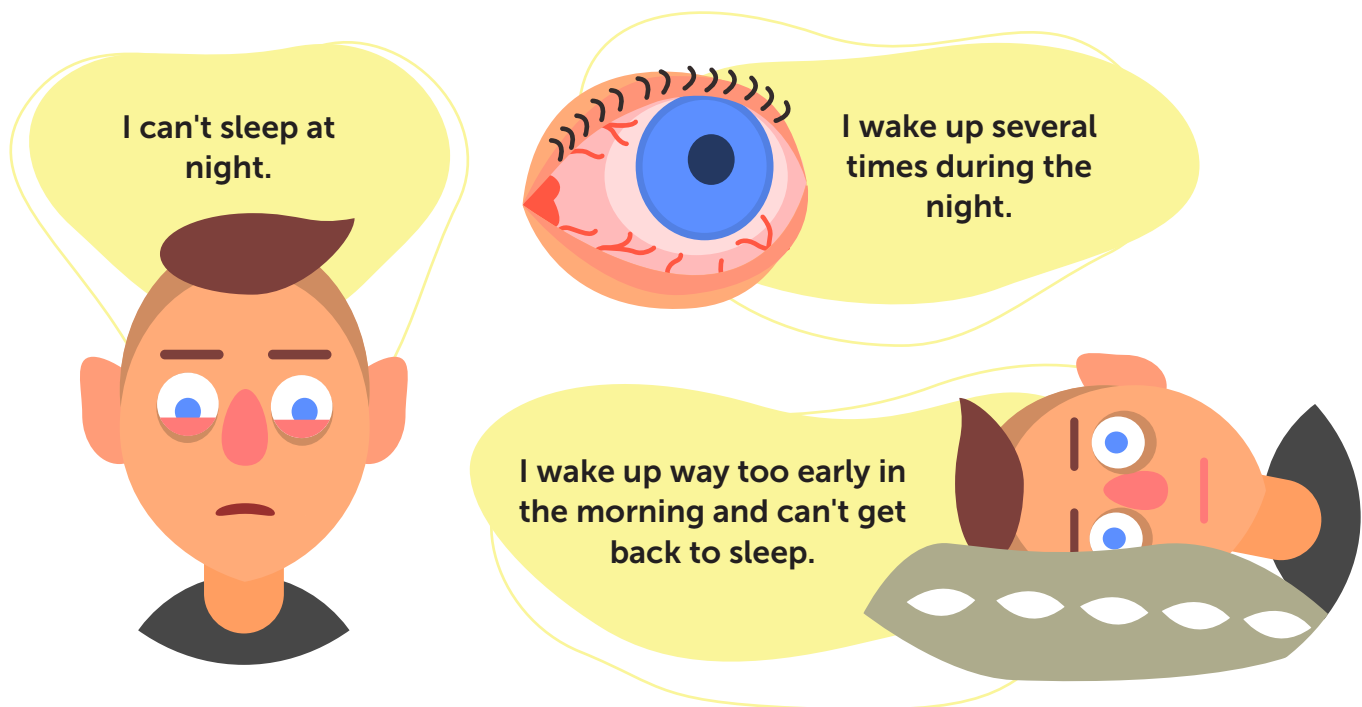


# Sleep and sleep habits

*Sleep can be a problem when you are in prison.*



Here are three people who have common sleep problems



Many people think the solution is sleeping pills. Sleep medication is not a solution to sleep problems because:

- **Sleep medication only works for 2-3 weeks before the body gets used to them.**  
With long-term, daily use, you can become depressed, irritable or feel indifferent. Forgetfulness and confusion are also common symptoms.
- **Eventually, you will need increasingly larger doses for them to work.**  
This in turn can increase the risk of addiction and troublesome side effects such as sleep problems, restlessness, anxiety, "hangovers", irritation, erectile dysfunction and muscle tension.
- **In the end, you will hardly benefit from sleeping pills at all,**  
but you will still have withdrawal symptoms and side effects.

## What can you do yourself?

On the following pages, you will find tips on what you can do to get better sleep without sleeping pills.

In order to get some sleep, it is wise to avoid sleep stealers.

*The biggest sleep stealer of them all is sleeping during the day.*

- Your body builds up your need for sleep when you're awake and active.
- If you sleep during the day, it will be more difficult to fall asleep at night.
- Avoid taking a nap even if you've had a sleepless night, this makes it easier to fall asleep in the evening.



It is wise to avoid minor sleep stealers as well.

- **Avoid drinking coffee, soda or energy drinks that contain caffeine after 5 p.m.**  
Caffeine is a sleep stealer.
- **Don't watch TV or the computer in the last half hour before going to sleep.**  
The blue light tricks your body into thinking it's daytime and is a sleep stealer.
- **Use relaxation exercises before bed.**  
Worries and restlessness before bedtime are sleep stealers.
- **Eat something light before going to sleep.**  
Being full or hungry when you go to bed is a sleep stealer.
- **Try to avoid smoking or using snuff in the last hour before bedtime.**  
Nicotine is a stimulant and a sleep stealer.





## TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

Teach your brain that it's time to sleep by creating pleasant evening routines.

### Do the same in the last half hour before going to bed every night

Here are some suggestions for what can be included in evening routines.  
You can also use your own.



Leave the window in the ventilation position for fifteen minutes before going to bed.



Shake the duvet and pillow.



Tidy your room.



Drink a hot drink without caffeine.



Turn off the TV/PC half an hour before you go to sleep.



Try to think of three good things that happened during the day (page 8)



Do a relaxation or breathing exercise (pages 9-10)

**Get up and go to bed around the same time every day.  
Even at the weekend!**

### Tips for what you can do when you lie awake in bed

- if you can't fall asleep at night within 20 minutes
- if you wake up at night and cannot get back to sleep within 20 minutes

#### Get up and do a calm activity

- Tidy your room
- Write a letter
- Read a book
- Stretch
- Do the relaxation exercise on page 10
- Sit in a chair and do the breathing exercise on page 9
- If you are troubled by negative thoughts, you can do the exercise on page 8

You can try to go to sleep again after a while.

### Why?

If you stay in bed when you can't sleep, your brain will learn to associate the bed with insomnia. If you get out of bed when you can't sleep, it is more likely that your brain will eventually associate the bed with sleep.

### Negative thoughts about sleep

It is normal for everyone to be a little worried about sleep. Our brain is a survival machine that wants to protect us. It creates negative thoughts so that we know what to watch out for.

But sometimes it gets too eager. Those who struggle to sleep often have a lot of negative thoughts about sleep. They can make you feel sad and discouraged, and can make it even harder for you to sleep.

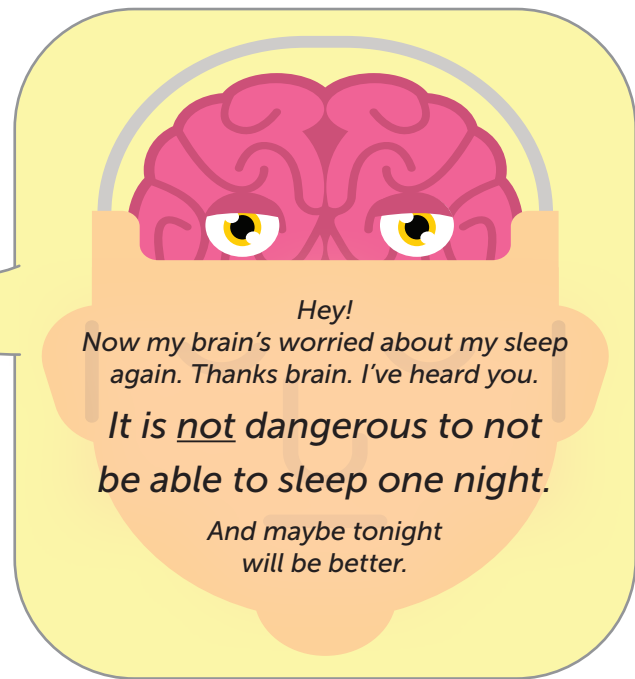




## WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

When you notice that you have negative thoughts about sleep, you can say to yourself:

The exercises on pages 12-13 can also help when you have negative thoughts about sleep before bed or when you wake up at night



## CREATE YOUR OWN SLEEP PLAN

Checklist:

- ☐ Don't sleep during the day.
- ☐ Don't drink coffee, energy drinks or cola after 5 p.m.
- ☐ Get up at the usual time even if I've had a bad night.
- ☐ Keep the window in the room in the ventilation position before it's time to sleep.
- ☐ Go to bed at about the same time every night.
- ☐ Do breathing or relaxation exercises.
- ☐ Don't use a computer or watch TV for the last half hour before bedtime.
- ☐ Don't smoke or use snuff in the last hour before bedtime.

My evening routines	Things I can do when I can't sleep

**IMPORTANT! You have to follow the plan for at least a couple of weeks before you can say whether it has had an effect or not.**

The goal is not perfect sleep for 8 hours every night. Nobody manages that. Even a small improvement in your sleep can have a big impact on your well-being and mood. If you find it difficult to make a plan on your own, you can get help from the prison health service.

# Anger management

*Anger can be important because it gives us strength, courage and energy.*

But it can also be a problem for some. When you're angry, you can do stupid things you wouldn't otherwise do.

You probably heard that it's good to have an outlet for anger. «*It's important to get your anger out, otherwise it will build up until you suddenly explode.*» This isn't true. You don't store anger inside. The anger mostly disappears by itself if you wait a little. Anger does not come as an explosion. You'll notice when you're starting to get angry. You'll begin to think angry thoughts, as if someone has done something wrong to you or that you have been treated unfairly.

Your body will also give you anger warning signs, such as a tense feeling, dry mouth, sweaty hands, pounding heart and so on. Furthermore, the more often you let out anger and aggression, the angrier and more aggressive you become. Why? Letting your anger out feels good. And when things feel good, we often do them again. So if you have an anger problem, it can become a vicious circle.

In order to break the vicious circle, it's important to explore different ways of responding when you're about to get angry.

## Anger signal

When you are angry, a lot happens in your body. You get a lot of energy that makes the body ready for flight or fight. It is much like anxiety (pages 29-31), but when you are angry we call the physical reactions anger warning signs.

### Examples of anger warning signs:

- Shouting/raising your voice
- Shaking
- Pounding heart
- Wanting to hit something or someone
- Feeling restless
- Rapid pulse
- Getting red in the face
- Clenching your jaw



### Think of the anger warning signs as a kind of traffic light

When you notice anger warning signs, you know you're about to get angry.

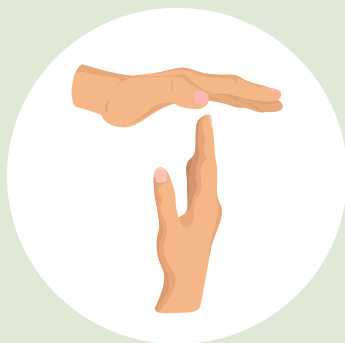
It doesn't matter what the signs are, the most important thing is that you recognise them so that you can try to avoid doing something you will regret later.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

If you learn to identify your anger signals before it explodes , you'll be able to control the situation.. Here are some suggestions for exercises that can help you when you start getting angry.

### Tips for what you can do when you recognise anger warning signs



#### 1. Time-out

Give yourself a time-out. This could last up to one hour. Take the opportunity to do something else in the meantime.



#### 2. Write

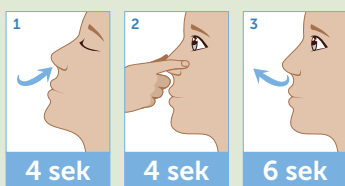
Analyse the situation and write down:

*What made you angry?*

*Why did you get angry?*

*Whose fault was it?*

Read it when you're not angry anymore. Are you thinking differently about the situation? If so, you can take that lesson with you.



#### 3. Calm down

Relaxation and breathing exercises (pages 9-10) are also good ways to calm down strong emotions and the part of the nervous system that creates the anger warning signs.



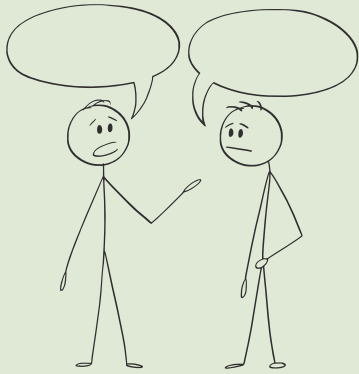
#### 4. Activity

If you are very angry, you probably have a lot of energy in your body. Then it might be a good idea to do some form of physical activity to release this energy quickly. You can, for example, walk, run, jump or do other exercise. You can also help release the energy in a calmer way.

*See the suggestions on the following page!*



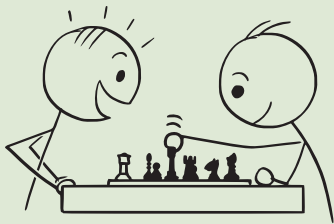
## ACTIVITIES



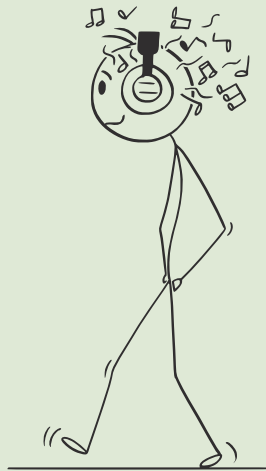
Talk to someone



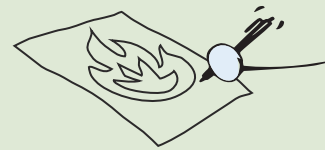
Read a book



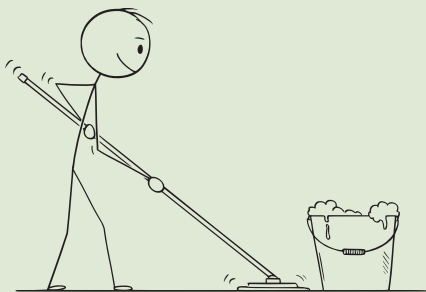
Play a game



Listen to music



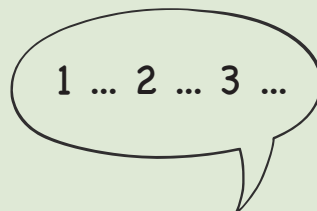
Draw your anger



Tidy your room



Write about your anger



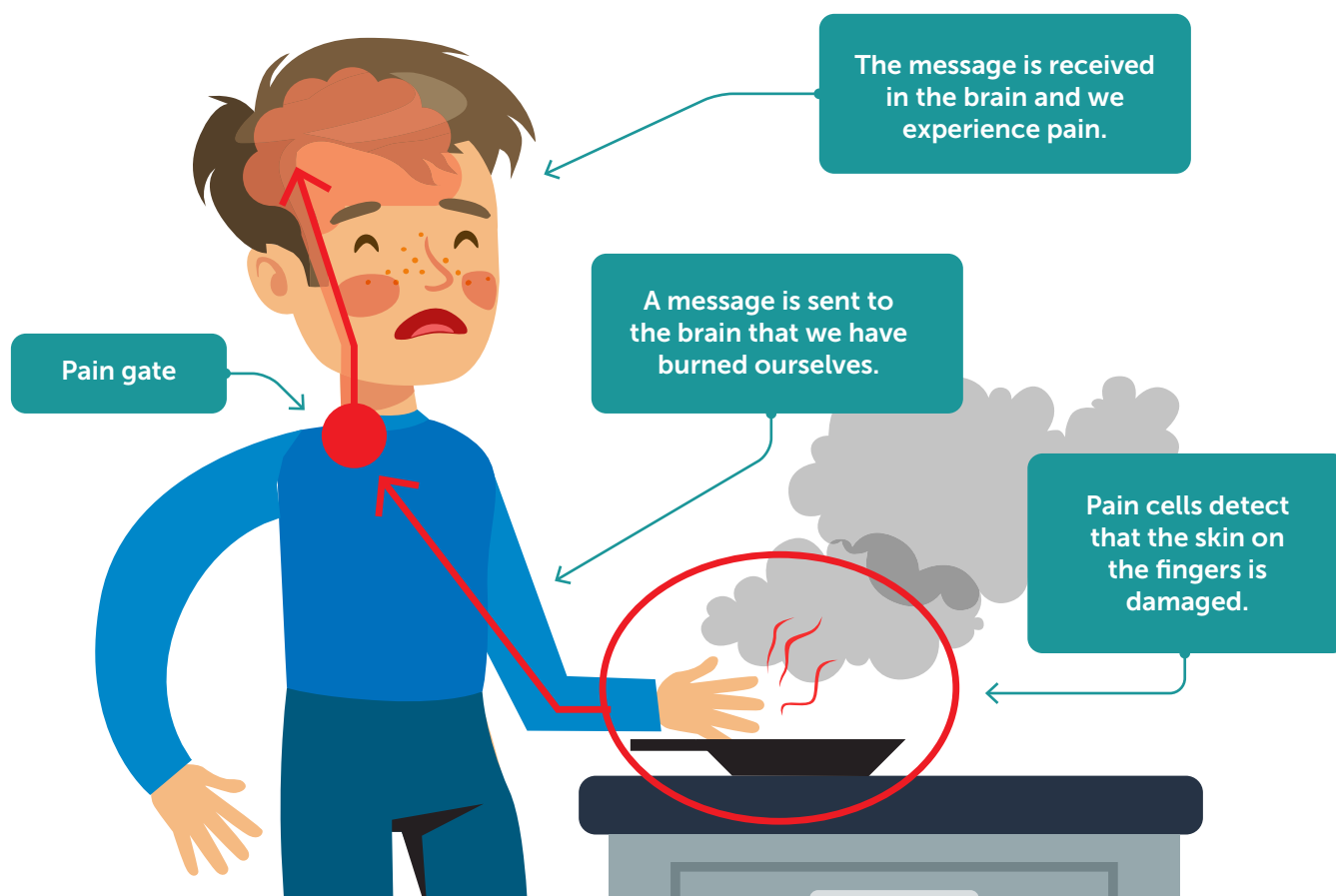
Count to 100

# Living with pain



## *Feeling pain helps us survive.*

If we touch a hot saucepan, we quickly withdraw our hand because we feel pain. This way we avoid serious injury to the body. We call this type of pain **acute pain**.



## **Chronic pain**

Chronic pain lasts over time even though we often have no visible injury. You can have pain in various parts of the body, such as in the shoulder, back or knee. This type of pain is usually not helpful, and can sometimes prevent us from living the life we want.

## **Negative thoughts about pain**

Many people who live with pain may have sad and angry thoughts about the pain. These thoughts can make you feel worse. For example, you might think: *«I'm going to go nuts if I'm going to be in this much pain all day!»* Then it can be helpful to use the exercises on page 8 or to do relaxation exercises (pages 9-10)

## **REMEMBER!**

**Painkillers can help with acute pain.**

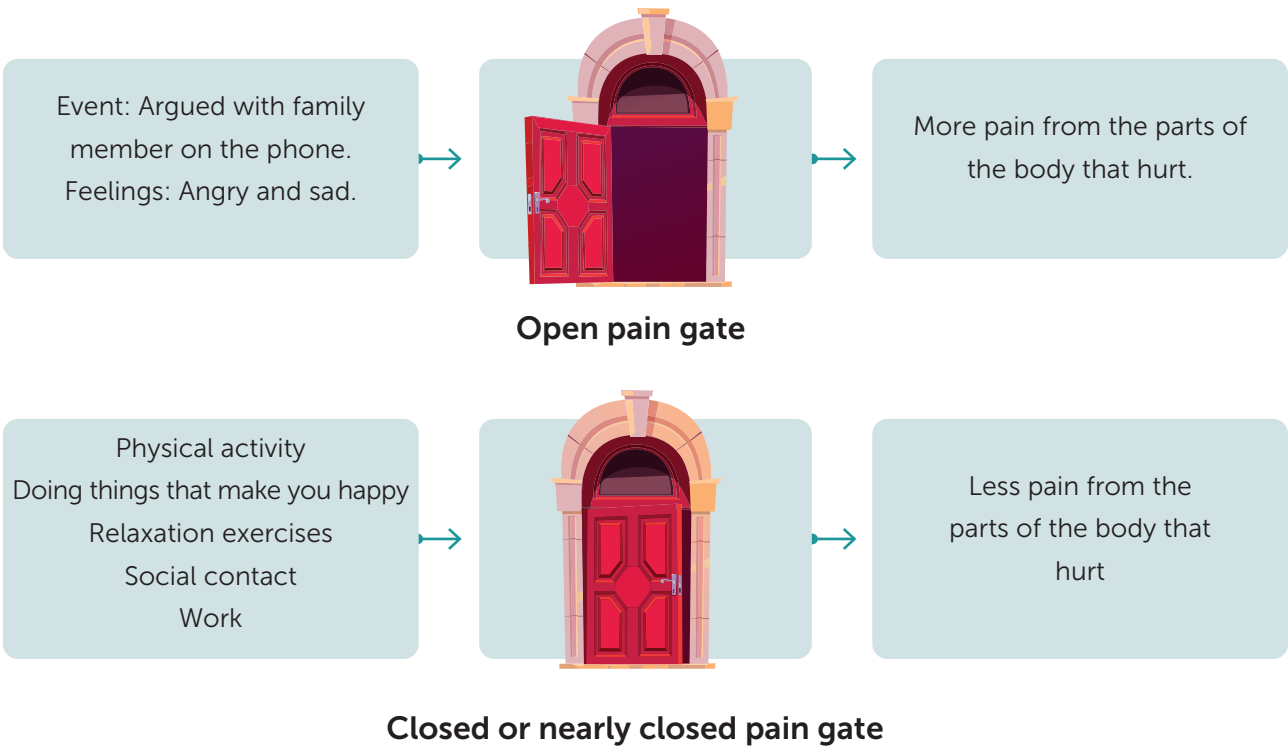
They offer limited relief for chronic pain. It's best to try other ways to get better.

Living with pain

Often we can't find an explanation for long-lasting pain. This can make you afraid of not being believed. It can also be quite annoying when someone says that the pain is all in your head.

**The truth is: How we feel affects how strong the pain is experienced.**

There is a pain gate in the spine (see drawing). The gate sometimes let small pain signals escape through to the brain. Other times it let through bigger pain signals. When we feel happy and satisfied, the gate can be closed or slightly open, and we can feel less pain. When we are sad, angry or stressed, the gate can be completely open, and we feel much more pain.



Common thoughts when living with pain:

When I get rid of the pain THEN

- I can start working.
- I can start exercising.
- I can have enough energy to be social.

WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

For the vast majority of people who have chronic pain, this is something they have to learn to live with. You have to try as hard as you can to live the life you want. If you start avoiding things you really want to do, it can contribute to keep the gate open. Do things you enjoy, because then the opening in the pain gate will be smaller. In this self-help booklet, there are several good examples of activities or exercises you can use to close the pain gate a little.

If the pain interferes with your sleep, you can try the sleep advice on pages 16-20 to sleep better. If you experience racing thoughts and rumination about your pain, you can do the exercises on pages 11-13. Positive exercises can be found on page 8.



# Sadness and depression

*It is common to feel sad and sorry for yourself at times.*

Sadness and depression are often used interchangeably, and it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. The main difference is duration. Sadness tends to go away after a little while, but when the sadness lasts for a long time it may be depression.



## HOW IS DEPRESSION EXPERIENCED?

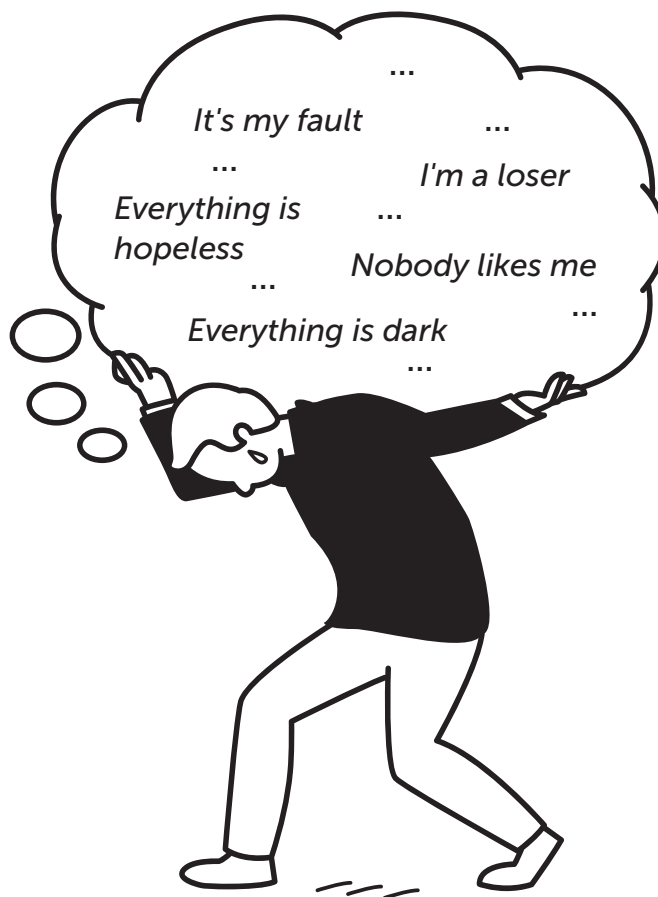
Depression is a psychological illness. Just like with other illnesses, you can be affected lightly, moderately or very severely.

**Thoughts** can be completely "black" as if everything is bad. It's hard to think about and remember good things. You might think that no one really cares and nothing will get better.

**Feelings** are also "black" and you may feel empty and sad, irritable and worried. Maybe you no longer care about things that were important to you before.

**Behaviour**, i.e. what you do, changes. It can feel like things are slowing down. Some prefer to be alone and can't bear to spend much time with others. It can be difficult to get tasks done, things you usually enjoyed doing, or even get out of bed. Some can be more grumpy and spiteful towards others.

**Your body** may feel tired, sick or exhausted most of the time.

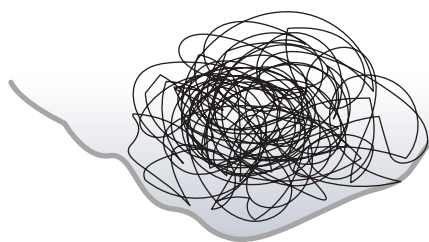


## Why do some people suffer from depression?

Depression is something that anyone can suffer from and is not a sign of weakness. Sometimes depression sneaks up on you, other times it is triggered by an extraordinary event.

*Being in prison is a good example of an extraordinary event.*

Financial problems, unemployment, conflicts with family or friends are other examples of conditions that can trigger depression. If you have had a difficult time for large parts of your life or if someone in your family has had depression (hereditary), you can more easily be affected by it.



## Suicidal thoughts

Many people who are having a very hard time may occasionally think about taking their own life. For some, such thoughts will pass as quickly as they came. But if you think about suicide a lot (for example, every day or several times a day), you should talk about it with someone you trust.

*You can, for example, talk to the prison chaplain, your contact officer, nurse or doctor.*

It can be difficult to see a way out when everything seems hopeless, and so you may need a little help to see the light at the end of the tunnel..

## WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

If you're sad or depressed, activity is one of your **most important** aids to getting better.

**Being active is about doing things. Everything from eating breakfast to taking a shower, cleaning your room, exercising, or playing cards with other inmates can be enjoyable activities.**

That way, you can fill your time with things that make you feel good, instead of being bored or ruminating

## Make a daily schedule

Many people find it difficult to get started. Having a plan for the day can help.

### Write down what you intend to do and when.

Your daily schedule can include the little things such as eating breakfast, taking a shower or more significant activities such as reading a book, socializing, using a video call or the phone, getting some fresh air in the yard, exercising, school or work training, listening to music and relaxation exercises.

Time:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Bearjadat
7 a.m.	Get up	Get up.	Get up		
9 a.m.	School	Eat breakfast	Exercise with Mats		
12 p.m.	Eat lunch in the prison unit	School	Eat lunch		
3.30 p.m. - 5.00 p.m.		Get some fresh air	Make chicken and rice		
7.00 p.m.	Exercise for 30 minutes	Cooking with the kitchen team	Play cards with Stian		
8.00 p.m.	Breathing exercise	Call home			
9.00 p.m.		Listen to music	Relaxation exercises		

- Write a letter
- Cooking
- Play games
- Breathing exercises
- Read a book/newspaper
- Call someone
- Exercise
- Get some fresh air
- Listen to music



## MORE SUGGESTIONS FOR LIFTING YOUR SPIRITS

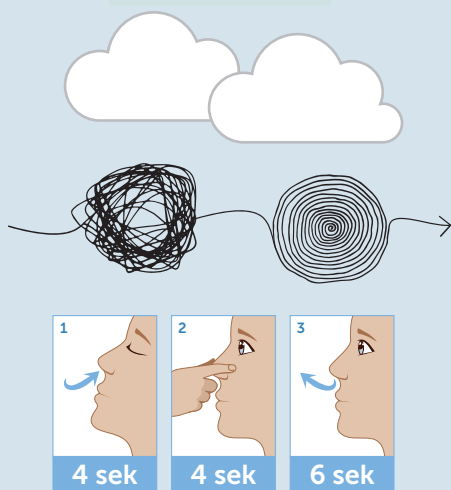
### 1. Join a kitchen team or make your own

It is both sociable, healthy and educational.

### 2. Get better at dealing with rumination and racing thoughts (pages 11-3)

### 3. Address problems dangling over you (pages 14-15)

### 4. Relaxation exercises (pages 9-10)



## The depression may say that this is of no use, but it's a bad adviser.

If you carry out one or more of these exercises, it will give you a feeling of well-being and mastery, and you will slowly but surely manage to climb out of the dark hole you are in now.



# Anxiety and avoidance

## *Anxiety comes in many forms.*

An important characteristic of anxiety is that you are afraid in situations where it is not usual to be afraid, and that this creates difficulties in everyday life.

Experiencing anxiety does not mean that you are a coward or weak. It just means that your body has learned to be afraid of things that are not really dangerous.



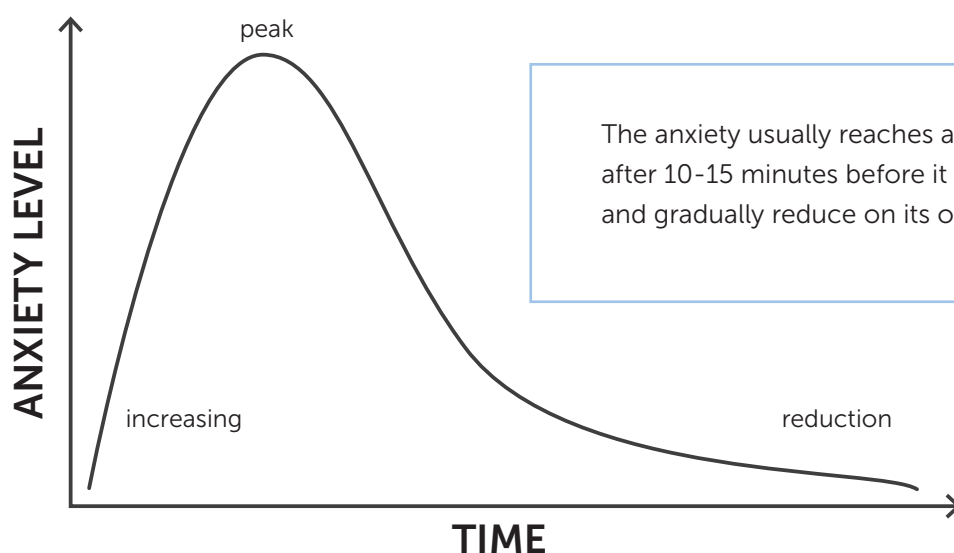
**The common denominator of all types of anxiety is a strong feeling of fear.**

*Fear is actually a part of the body's alarm system that protects us from danger.* When you are afraid, a part of the nervous system will initiate a number of physical mechanisms that enable the body to fight or flight

## **When you are anxious, a lot happens in your body.**

Your breathing will be faster and more shallow, your heartbeat speeds up and your blood pressure increases, the bigger muscles in the arms and legs will be prioritised and strengthened.

Anxiety can cause symptoms such as difficulties with breathing, dry mouth, pounding heart, tremors, dizziness, numbness and tension in the body. Some may become nauseous and vomit.



Some people may experience symptoms when they are alone in their room behind a locked door. The situation in itself does not have to be dangerous, but the body can react in the same way as when you are in a dangerous situation. This means that the body's alarm system can go off even if there is no danger around. ***Anxiety can just be a false alarm.***

## AVOIDANCE AND EXPOSURE

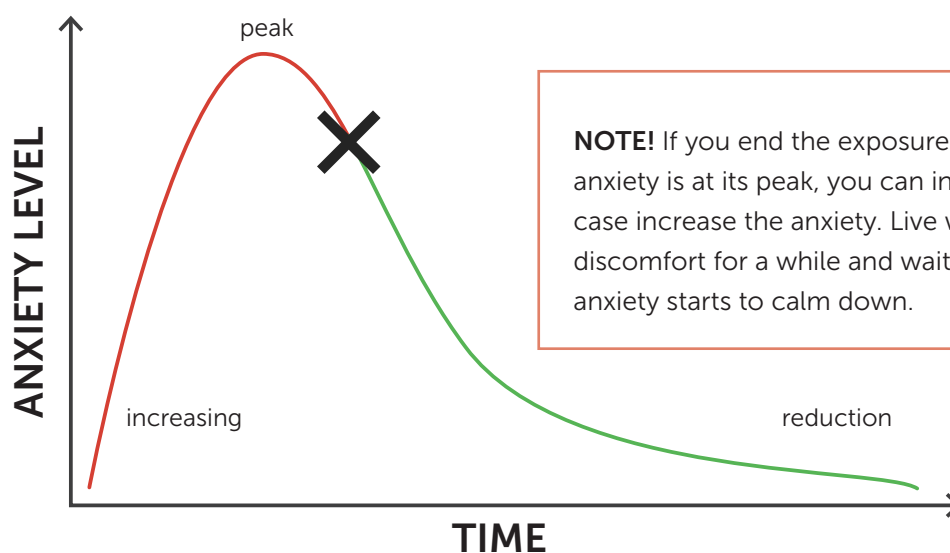
Anxiety is unpleasant, so it is only natural to want to avoid situations where anxiety occurs. But when anxiety starts to cause difficulties in your everyday life, you should address with it.

One form of anxiety training is to expose yourself to what you are afraid of. By gradually exposing oneself to what is scary, the anxiety will also gradually decrease over time. This is called exposure and can be done both on your own or together with healthcare personnel.

Exposure therapy is about exposing yourself to what you are afraid of and teaching the body that it is not dangerous. The goal is for you to get **used to** what you are afraid of.

It is important not to give up while the anxiety is at its peak. You have to wait until the anxiety starts to calm down. Why? Anxiety is very tiring for the body, so after 10-15 minutes the body will stop sending out stress hormones. Your brain tells you that it is time to relax a little. You will gradually feel more relaxed, even if what you are afraid of is still present. Your body will then feel that it is not so dangerous after all.

Exposure is a form of learning, so it is important to repeat it a few times for it to stick.

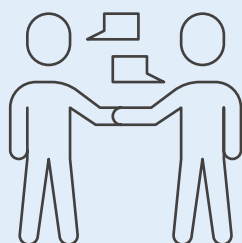
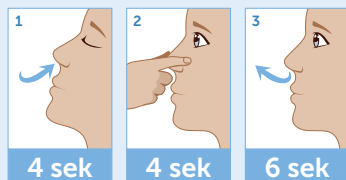


*After an anxiety attack in the outdoor yard, I became afraid to go outside. Just the thought of going out there made me uneasy. Unfortunately, avoidance contributes to maintaining the problem. I didn't know that then.*

*I was advised by a nurse to practice going outside. She thought I would overcome my anxiety like this. After a while I decided to give it a try. The first day I just stood by the door to the outdoor yard. When I calmed down a bit, I opened the door. After a while I was ready to step over the threshold. I went on like this for weeks. But I noticed it became easier. Now I go outside several times a week. Occasionally the anxiety comes back, but I'm not so afraid of it anymore.*

## WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

Here are some suggestions for exercises that can help you. Try to find the exercise(s) that are right for you. You should practice some of the exercises regularly, even when you feel calm, so that they can be used in situations where they are needed.



1. First, you can tell yourself that anxiety is not dangerous. It could be a false alarm.
2. Don't fight the anxiety. Just let it come. It will usually peak within 10 - 15 minutes and gradually reduce on its own without you having to do anything.
3. Practice exposing yourself to what you think is scary. It can be enough to do just a little, and increase later. If you find it difficult to do alone, you can ask for professional help.
4. Perform breathing techniques (pages 9-10) to calm down the part of the nervous system that is causing symptoms.
5. Talk to someone about how you are feeling. Call someone in your family or a friend. It can also be another inmate, coordinator or you can get help from a priest or health personnel in the prison.
6. Divert yourself by splashing ice-cold water on your face with your eyes closed. Or count something in the room you are in, or from 100 downwards. You can also do other activities that you find in the booklet to distract yourself.



# Painful experiences and traumas

*Many who are in prison have experienced violence and other bad events earlier in their lives.*

Even if it's been a long time, you can still have problems afterwards. Sometimes the pain gets worse when you experience something that reminds you of what happened. Special events, stress, the experience of losing control can also increase the symptoms. Therefore, many inmates may experience that "everything comes back" when they go to prison.

The most common problems you can experience afterwards are re-experiences in the form of nightmares and waking dreams, often called flashbacks. Flashbacks are brief, momentary memories of past painful experiences. Some say it's like watching a movie and the flashbacks contain the worst parts of the event.

Nightmares and dreams can be very vivid and frightening. Some may wake up at night feeling completely confused. Many struggle with this so much that they have trouble going to bed and dread the night.



**It can seem as if re-experiences occur completely out of the blue, but sometimes they can be triggered by noticing a particular smell or taste, seeing or hearing something reminiscent of the event.**

Those who have experienced bad events/traumas may feel agitated, tense, restless and shaky. Some people feel irritable, have poor concentration and difficulty sleeping. Others may experience that their body disconnects, feeling distant and numb..

**Many people experience that the past and the present blend together and it can be difficult to be present here and now**



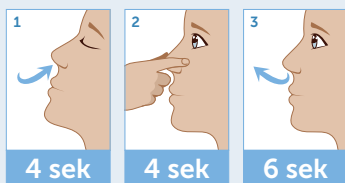
**For many, bad memories can be triggered at night.**

Some have difficulty falling asleep in the evening and wake up frequently during the night.

Advice for better sleep can be found on pages 16-20

## WHAT CAN YOU DO YOURSELF?

Here are some suggestions for exercises that can help you tackle painful thoughts, memories and feelings. You should practice some of the exercises regularly, even when you feel calm, so that they can be used in situations where they are needed



### 1. Breathing exercise

Carrying out breathing exercises and relaxation exercises (pages 9-10) calms down strong emotions and the part of the nervous system that gives physical reactions.

### 2. Grounding

If, for example, you have been exposed to violence, it may feel like it is happening again and that you are back to when it happened. Here are some examples where you can use your senses to help you be present here and now.

Sit on a chair with both legs on the floor and your back against the back of the chair. Rest your hands in your lap. Keep your focus on your legs and feel how they meet the ground. Imagine that your legs are taking root in the ground and down into the earth. How does it feel?

Or you can:

- take a hot or cold shower.
- eat something sour, strong or sweet.
- drink a hot or cold drink.

Try to stay focused for as long as possible. Register what you feel when you do the exercises



### 3. Safe place

Think of a place that makes you feel calm and safe. This could be a place you've been to once, or a place you've seen on film or heard about. It could be in your own home or the home of someone you know, or somewhere in nature. You can also create such a place in your imagination.

Imagine the details that are in this place: colours, smells, sounds. Imagine the sun, feel the wind or the temperature. Feel what it's like to be safe.

You can go to this place whenever you want and as often as you want. Gradually, by just thinking about your safe place, you will become more calm and safe.

# Help and support during time in custody

*Many inmates find it difficult to seek help or support even if they need it.*

The reason for this could be, among other things, that they do not trust the legal system and the prison staff, are afraid of being seen as weak or that they do not know where to seek help.

**If you need help or support, you can contact the prison staff.**

Write a note to the person you wish to contact and hand it off to an officer. This could be a healthcare professional, contact officer, social educator or prison chaplain.

## **Would you like a visit?**

Loneliness behind bars can be tough, and a visit from a volunteer outside the walls can mean a lot in a monotonous prison life. A visitor or visiting companion is a person associated with a voluntary organisation such as the Red Cross and WayBack. If you would like a visiting companion or visitor, write a note to the prison chaplain.

## **Do you want to talk to someone on the phone?**

Some people find it difficult to talk to strangers face to face, then it might be easier to talk on the phone. Helpline is a free phone service for anyone who needs someone to talk to. Make an agreement with your contact officer so that you have the telephone number registered, it's free of charge, and the calls are not intercepted neither do they deduct your call minutes.

### **Mental Helse Helpline**

**Tel: 116 123**

Opening hours: All day, all year round.

### **Red Cross Helpline**

**Tel: 815 55 201**

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.



Photo: The Norwegian Correctional Service

# Where can you seek help after release?

## Preparation for release

Good information can make it easier to achieve the best possible re-entry to society.

On [www.tilbakeføring.no](http://www.tilbakeføring.no) you can find relevant information about re-entry from prison to society. On the website there are areas such as: housing, finance, work/education, health and networking. Under each area there is information on what to do during your time in custody to ensure the best possible re-entry to society. The website can be used as a tool for you as an inmate, the prison's staff, other partners and relatives.

## After release

For many people, re-entering society after being in prison can require more than a job, housing and health services. A number of voluntary organisations offer different services such as practical help, activities and social networks after release.

**Narcotics Anonymous (NA)** is a group for people with drug problems who meet regularly to help each other stay drug-free. To be a member, you don't have to be sober, but you have to want to be.

For more information about NA in your municipality, you can ask the contact officer or re-entry coordinator, or you can send an email to [webmaster@nanorge.org](mailto:webmaster@nanorge.org).

## Upon release

Being released is usually a joy for the main person, but it can also feel like a scary situation. After spending months, or years in prison, it can feel strange to be outside the walls. So it can be a good idea if someone meets the person to be released at the gate so that they don't have to be alone in this transition. For those inmates who don't have anyone close to them who can be there, voluntary organisations such as **WayBack** or the **Røde Kors** often have the opportunity to come forward with help and support upon release.

**Wayback** is an example of an organisation that offers such services. They have fixed times when they are available in the prison. Other organisations that can be contacted during time in custody include For Fangers Pårørende (For Prisoners' Next of Kin). In addition, there are other locally-rooted services that are important players in re-entry work, such as **Kirkens bymisjon** and **Crux**.

For a summary of and more information about the services linked to the prison you are in and the city you live in, you can ask your contact officer. It is best to try to establish contact with the support apparatus outside the walls before release.

## If you need health care, your GP is a key person

Når du soner en dom i fengsel er fengselslegen din fastlege. Etter løslatelse har du en annen fastlege.

Hvis du ønsker en annen fastlege kan du bytte. Det kan du gjøre selv via fastlegesiden til [helsenorge.no](http://helsenorge.no)

*If you are unsure who your GP is, call 23 32 70 00 or go to the GP page at [helsenorge.no](http://helsenorge.no).*



**This self-help booklet is designed for people in prison.  
The booklet provides information on mental health and tips  
on how to take care of yourself during your time in custody.**

The booklet has been designed in collaboration between SIFER-Nord,  
the Norwegian Correctional Service, prison inmates, WayBack and  
Helsekompetanse, Universitetssykehuset Nord-Norge.

Illustrations: Universitetssykehuset Nord-Norge v/ Helsekompetanse, Colourbox, Shutterstock and Unsplash