

R.A.I.S.E. Spotting signs of depression in men



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Introduction



Ewan Irvine
BACP Trustee and therapist

There are longstanding stereotypes in society that 'men don't cry', 'men should always be in control of their emotions' and that 'men should be strong', rather than seek help from others or talk openly about their feelings. However, mental health issues affect us all, irrespective of gender. Although society has become more open to discussions around mental health in recent years, these societal stereotypes mean many men could still be suffering in silence.

Depression remains one of the key mental health issues that men face with half of therapists reporting an increase in men presenting with depression in the past year¹. Despite this, 56% of therapists agreed that men are less likely to get mental health support than women¹.

Well-known symptoms of depression include feeling sad or low. However, depression can take other forms and affect people in many different ways. It can have an impact on someone's mood, behaviour and thoughts, make them feel tired, tearful, irritable, angry, anxious and can lead to a loss of interest in things people previously enjoyed. They may also lose concentration, self-confidence, appetite and motivation.

But therapists report that there are often differences in the way men and women present with symptoms of depression, with men more prone to Risk-taking, Anger, Isolation, Substance abuse and Exhaustion.

To help support and encourage men who are suffering to seek qualified help, BACP has created the acronym **R.A.I.S.E.**

R – Risk-taking

A – Anger

I – Isolation

S – Substance abuse

E – Exhaustion

While these symptoms aren't exhaustive or exclusive to men, we hope this acronym will help open up conversations around men's mental health and serve as a useful starting point to spot some of the more common male-specific symptoms of depression. If you recognise any of these feelings and symptoms either in yourself or a loved one, then do read on. The following guide, written by trained therapists, contains lots of advice to help recognise and manage your depression.

¹ Source: BACP Mindometer survey 2023

Contributing therapists and case studies

This booklet has been carefully co-created with highly experienced therapists. Together they are shedding a light on the less recognised symptoms of depression, which comprise the R.A.I.S.E. acronym. Each therapist has shared their one key piece of advice for men struggling with depression.

We would also like to thank the men from Men Walking and Talking – Dan, Ashley, Arran, Mark and Andy, who have shared their experiences with therapy for this booklet in hope that it will encourage other men to seek qualified help.



Anthony Davis

BACP therapist

“Strength is not found in the absence of struggle, but rather in the determination to rise above it. If you are experiencing depression, seek help, speak your truth, and remember that your emotional vulnerability is a testament to your courage.”



Rob Wotton

BACP therapist

“Courage is not the absence of fear, it is feeling that fear and facing it. Depression can be the darkest place we will ever go. It will zap our energy. Make us behave in ways we find unacceptable. And it will cut us off from those we love the most. But the bravest, most courageous thing we can do is to reach out for help.”



Gary Bloom

BACP therapist

“If you’re feeling sad or low three times a day for three weeks, it’s time to see your GP and discuss your options. There are many types of depression, but usually, one is situational – something is going on in your life. The other is general – when you are feeling down, and you don’t know why. In both instances seek help now.”



Dee Johnson

BACP therapist

“You can still work, play, socialise, laugh, have a good life yet, be silently depressed. It’s the inner punishing self – loathing voice, a heavy foggy feeling in your body and head. Its anger, exhaustion, irritation, emptiness, nothingness, anxiety, loneliness, loss of pleasure. Don’t dismiss these symptoms, please talk to someone.”



Nicola Vanlint

BACP therapist

“Remember that self-care is your ally. It’s not selfish; it’s essential. Take time for activities you enjoy, get enough sleep, eat well, and exercise. These small steps can make a big difference. Prioritise self-compassion. Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding that you would offer a friend in the same situation.”



Risk-taking

Risk-taking

Thrill-seeking behaviours can normally mask a lack of interest or structure in a person's life. When an individual has what they consider to be an uninteresting life, they may engage in risk-taking behaviours so they see themselves as more interesting or special.

Identification with a persona is something which men tend to resonate with and is perpetuated in popular culture. In films we often see male main characters categorised as the athlete, superhero or class clown. Identifying with a specific persona sometimes helps to give someone purpose but without this, men are more likely to promote risky, behaviours in an effort to make their lives more interesting.



How it manifests

Risk-taking can manifest itself in many ways:

- **Impulsivity:** You may act on impulse and not take enough time to rationalise an action.
- **Violence and other extreme behaviours:** You may engage in violent, anti-social or bravado-associated behaviour, such as driving really fast, gambling or even getting into fights.
- **Lack of concern for safety:** You may cause significant changes to other people's lives or put yours or other people's lives in danger in search of that dopamine kick.



Top tips

There's a fine line when it comes to engaging in risky behaviours. While at the time they can feel fun or exciting, if experienced repeatedly or in extreme measures, they can be damaging to your life and the lives of others. Find out ways to manage these impulses below:

Know your triggers

Consider your triggers and the situations that tempt you into engaging in risky behaviours, whether this is seeing a betting advert, being with a certain group of friends or consuming alcohol. Being aware of your triggers and recognising when these impulses may arise is the first step in managing this symptom.

Distract yourself when you feel triggered

Use distraction techniques such as going for a walk or playing a video game to create space between your thought and action. This will help to reduce the likelihood of you engaging in risky behaviours as you'll have more time to rationalise the thought or impulse.

Structure and routine

Implement a healthy structure and routine into your life and stick to it. A healthy routine may look different to different people, but the most important thing is that it's healthy. This will act as a metaphorical barrier between you and the risky behaviour.



When to see a therapist

It's time to see a therapist when you find it hard to recognise these behaviours as negative or harmful, or if other people are recognising that this behaviour is damaging. If people around you are worried that you are being a danger to yourself or somebody else, or if you're unable to consider the consequences of your actions, it's important to seek qualified help.

“ It can be hard to have an open and honest conversation with someone who is emotionally invested, like a family member or partner; that's why I think therapy works and why it worked so well for me. A lot of men are scared to go to therapy and open up but taking that step can change a life.

Therapy was an epiphany moment that made me realise I didn't have to live like this anymore and taught me ways to understand my feelings. ”

Dan, 37



Anger

Anger

Anger is an emotion characterised by feelings of frustration, irritation, hostility, or rage targeted towards someone or ourselves. This could be because the person feels deliberately mistreated, or if their wellbeing and social status have been threatened or not respected. Anger can be suppressed or overtly expressed. It's often a learned way of dealing with the world (no one is an inherently angry person) and can become a default emotion early in life. Anger can be good if it allows people to express negative feelings or motivates them to find solutions to problems. However, frequent and heightened experiences of this emotion can have a negative impact on mental and physical health.

Anger in men, like in anyone, is a natural emotion. It can be triggered by various factors, including societal expectations, stress, relationship conflicts, and unresolved trauma. Due to traditional gender norms, men may be more prone to types of anger that discourage emotional expression, leading them to suppress feelings until they boil over. Additionally, societal pressures to appear dominant, strong and in control can exacerbate anger problems.



How it manifests

Anger in men can manifest in a few ways:

- **Physical manifestations:** You may exhibit physical signs like clenched fists, tensed muscles, a raised voice, and an aggressive posture when angry.
- **Emotional suppression:** You may have been conditioned to suppress your emotions, including anger, which can lead to an internalised expression of anger. This might manifest as withdrawal, silence, or passive-aggressive behaviour or physical ill health.
- **Risk-taking behaviour:** You may channel your anger into risk-taking behaviours like substance abuse or reckless driving.
- **Violence:** In some cases, unmanaged anger can escalate into physical violence, posing a risk to yourself and others around you.



Top tips

Learning how to identify and manage anger can lead to growth and change for the better. Here are some tips to better manage your anger:

Practise relaxation techniques

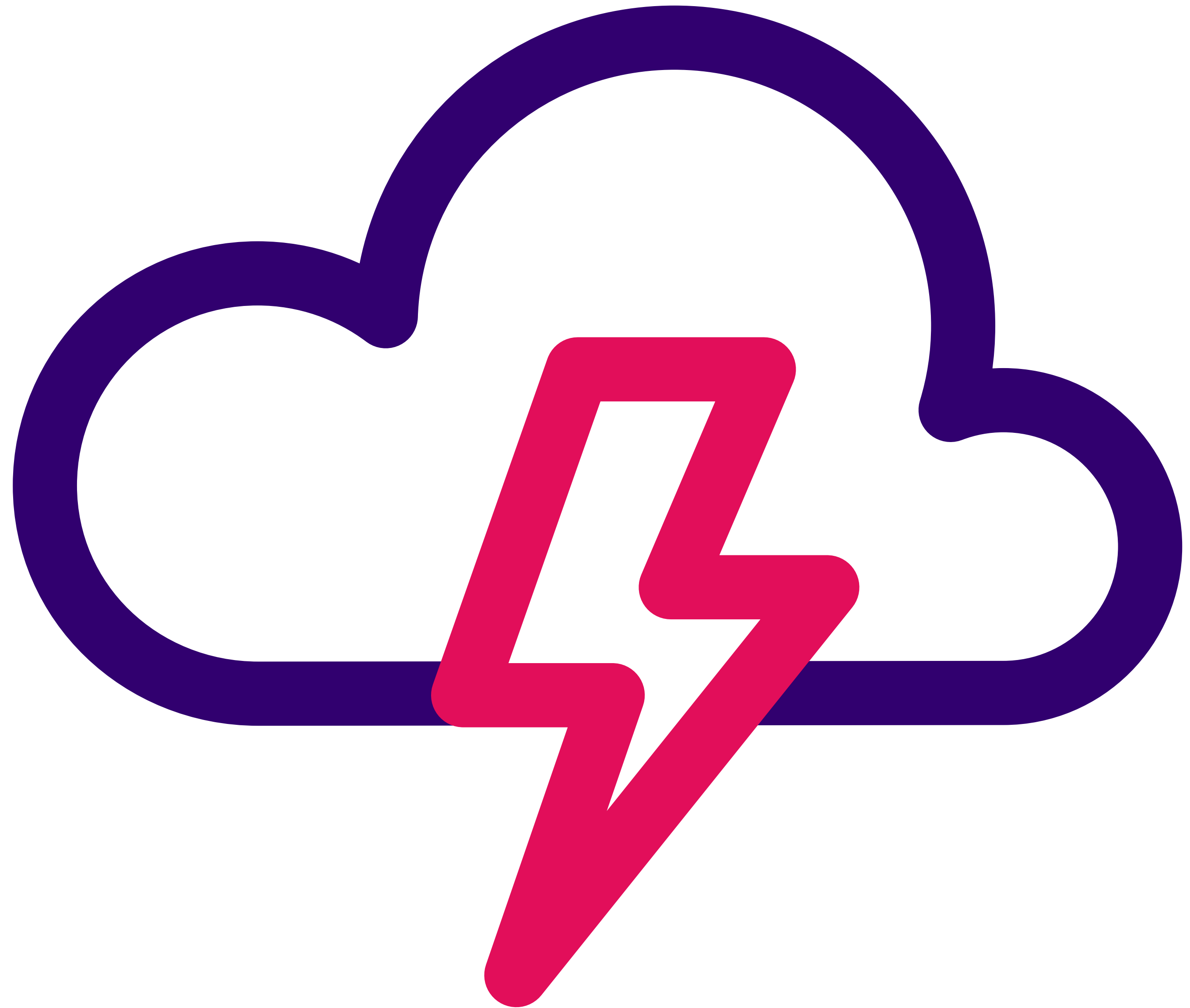
Learn relaxation techniques like deep breathing, mindfulness, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation to calm yourself during moments of anger. Try the 4-7-8 breathing exercise – breathe in for four counts, hold for seven counts, and breathe out for eight counts. This helps to calm you down and prevents you from an impulsive reaction.

Separate the emotion from the behaviour

They are two different things. Learn to separate the two. You can have the emotion of anger, but you don't have to engage in unhelpful or destructive behaviours.

Communication skills

Improving your communication skills surrounding your emotions involves both self-awareness and empathy. Reflect on your own emotions and learn to express them effectively, while also being attuned to the emotions of those you're communicating with, fostering better understanding and connection.



When to see a therapist

It's important for you to seek help when anger becomes chronic, uncontrollable, or starts affecting relationships, work or physical health. When your feelings are becoming overwhelming and they are affecting your life in a negative way and impacting the lives of people around you, it's time to ask for qualified help.

“ I had been suffering from unexplained anger outbursts throughout my adult life. Therapy helped me get to the root of this and taught me how to manage my emotional responses to my triggers. ”

Mark, 51



Isolation

Isolation

Men are often told to be strong, to hide their emotions and to never show vulnerability. They put on a brave face, 'man up' and pretend to the world that they're fine. They bottle their emotions, suppress them and get on with it. But that's where the problems begin. Those painful feelings are internalised and this can have a damaging effect.

As a result, men might withdraw from their loved ones and cut themselves off from friends. Isolation is characterised by a sense of loneliness, disconnection, and withdrawal from social interactions. Men tend to live silently with feelings of loneliness instead of divulging them.

Spending time in isolation can also cause health problems. Research has found that a lack of social interaction can also lead to cardiovascular problems like heart disease and increased blood pressure. It's also associated with higher rates of anxiety and depression and an increased risk of dementia².

2 Source: Loneliness, Social Isolation, and Cardiovascular Health



How it manifests

In men, isolation can manifest differently due to societal and cultural factors:

- **Emotional stoicism:** You may hide your feelings because of adherence to traditional masculine roles. This makes it challenging to detect your emotional struggles.
- **Increased workaholism:** You may immerse yourself in work to avoid dealing with emotional issues.
- **Substance abuse:** You might turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with isolation.
- **Physical health issues:** Isolation can contribute to physical health problems, like high blood pressure and heart disease, which you may not connect to your emotional state.



Top tips

There are many ways to help manage feelings of isolation.

Take it slowly

On paper it may sound easy to speak to people about how you're feeling so they can offer you support, but in practice this can be a key hurdle, especially if you've been feeling isolated for a long time. Try initiating conversations with friends or family members who you trust and take it slowly to prevent feeling overwhelmed.

Start small

If you don't feel comfortable opening up to a friend or family member, start small by making conversation with the people you come across in your day-to-day life, like a neighbour or colleague. These conversations don't need to be deep or emotional, even light-hearted small talk may help you feel less isolated.

Engage in social activities

Try participating in social activities, sports clubs and teams, or support groups. Even if it feels challenging, it can help you to build connections with others and reduce feelings of isolation.



When to see a therapist

It's important for you to seek help with isolation if it persists for an extended period of time, if it's affecting your daily life, or if it leads to destructive behaviours or thoughts. It's also crucial to seek help if there are physical symptoms or substance abuse issues as a result of isolation.

“ I think isolation was probably one of the key factors that started it all. When I had to move from working in the armed forces to a job where I was working alone, it was detrimental to my mental health.

I felt lonely and isolated but didn't know what to do. I'm a huge advocate of therapy services and I recommend it to anyone who's struggling. It takes a huge weight off your shoulders.”

Ashley, 41



Substance abuse

Substance abuse

Sometimes men can develop an addiction because they're self-medicating to avoid, block or enhance a feeling. It can be a trauma-triggering coping strategy, which takes them away from reality and having to face the true problems going on beneath the surface.

Addiction is a very subjective topic and the reasons for it vary from person to person. We all think, feel and behave differently, and therefore respond differently to the emotions and feelings we experience.

Any addictive substance or behaviour leads to actual changes in the brain, which promote a natural response for desire and can lead to losing self-control. With every drug high, there inevitably follows a low. The temptation then is to use more to escape this depressive state. The lower that downward spiral takes people, the lower they feel and their self-worth disappears as self-loathing grows. The more someone feels like this, the more they think they need to drink and use.



How it manifests

Substance abuse can manifest itself in different ways. It can start as seemingly innocent, pleasurable and recreational but can quickly become unwanted, problematic and painful.

- **Defensiveness:** You may feel defensive or irritated if challenged about your substance use.
- **Prioritising substance usage:** You may want to engage in the addictive behaviour over other life activities.
- **Social life centred around substance usage:** You may have your social life and connections centre around your use.
- **Struggle with abstinence:** You may fail to commit to a few days of abstinence or consciously count down the days until you can do it again.



Top tips

If you are struggling with substance abuse, you could try these tips.

Find a new passion

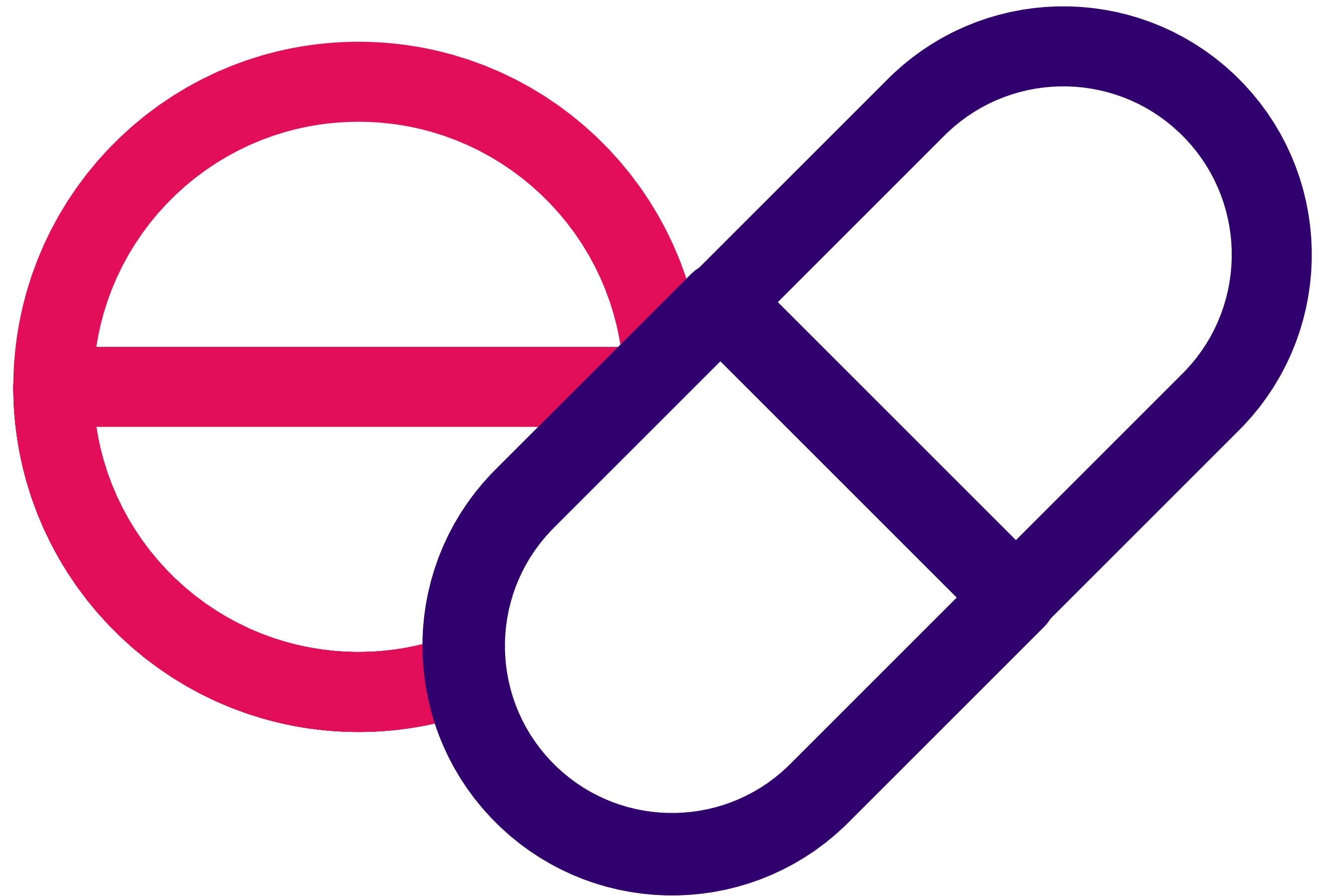
Finding a new activity that you're passionate about can help you refocus. From volunteering, to learning to play a new instrument, to getting into photography – picking up a new hobby, joining a sports team or finding new interests can bring a new outlet and sense of purpose to your life. This might also lead you to making new friends with similar interests to yours.

Learn to relax

When you're tense, you tend to do what's familiar. When you're relaxed, you're more open to new things. Different relaxation strategies work for different people so take some time exploring what works for you. You could start by trying meditation, breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Manage the urges

It can be hard to ignore urges, but you can try to keep them at bay by acknowledging your craving to someone you trust, finding an activity to do that will keep you busy and then checking in on how you feel after. This can help you change your behaviour and manage your urges.



When to see a therapist

When your physical and mental health are in jeopardy, or you're taking risks associated with the substances you're using and causing harm to yourself and others, then it's time to seek professional support. When your time using (which includes considering, obtaining, using and recovering from substances) outweighs other normal daily activities, and when your finances, family and work are being impacted, talk to someone who fully understands this disorder, such as a specialist therapist.

“ When I was younger, I was drinking quite a lot; I would often go and hide away from those around me. I didn't want them to see me, I didn't want to talk about how I felt. I was isolating myself and drinking a lot when I was going through depression.

I found working with the therapist beneficial, because they always ask, “Why did you do that?” It makes you reflect on it. ”

Andy, 44

A photograph of a man with a beard sleeping in bed. He is wearing a grey t-shirt and a watch on his left wrist. He is holding a black remote control in his left hand. The image is overlaid with abstract purple and pink shapes. The word "Exhaustion" is written in white text in the bottom left corner.

Exhaustion

Exhaustion

While depression is often associated with sadness and hopelessness, it can also manifest itself physically through exhaustion or lack of energy. Exhaustion can be caused by lack of sleep, change in routine and other external life stressors.

Exhaustion often tends to be related to burnout, which can arise when we don't implement clear boundaries or have never learnt how to switch off from work properly.

When we feel exhausted, our mental and emotional capacities are pushed to their limits. Emotions can make us feel exhausted and exhaustion can make us feel emotional. They go hand in hand.



How it manifests

Exhaustion can manifest in men in several ways.

Burnout from work: You may feel unable to stop thinking about work, to the point where you're taking work home and working long hours. This can often have a knock-on effect by negatively impacting your relationships with friends, family and loved ones.

No longer participating in activities, interests or keeping up with routine: You may notice yourself not keeping up with your personal hygiene or day-to-day routine. You may also stop participating in activities you love.

Irregular sleeping patterns: You may be unable to get up in the mornings or be suffering with insomnia.



Top tips

There are lots of things we can do to manage exhaustion.

Account for downtime in your daily routine

Log your day in a diary where you include timings for when you turn off your electronic devices, read, or go for a walk.

Lead a healthier lifestyle

Exercise more. It boosts your mood and dopamine levels and gives you a sense of achievement that you've done something productive. Our diet can help counteract fatigue; particularly foods rich in complex carbohydrates, like whole grains and oats, as well as foods high in protein such as lean meats and fish. Additionally, incorporating fruits, vegetables and nuts for vitamins and minerals can boost your energy levels. Staying hydrated with water is essential too.

Switch off from work during out of office hours

It is crucial for a healthy work-life balance. Set clear boundaries, communicate your availability, and limit work-related tasks during your downtime to recharge and stay effective.



When to see a therapist

When exhaustion is impacting your daily life, causing physical or emotional distress, or hindering your ability to cope with work-related stressors. A therapist can provide strategies to address burnout and improve your mental wellbeing.

“ When things get overwhelming, I’m constantly feeling drained and exhausted. I get up in the morning and try to get on with my day but find myself getting exhausted again. Sometimes the exhaustion can confuse you, you know what you want to say or do but it can be a struggle. But I joined group therapy – it’s just a safe space to open up to the therapist or other people and listen. A lot of the times, you pick up on not only what a person is going through, but also how they get through it. ”

Arran, 45

A photograph of two men walking through a forest. The man on the left has brown hair and is wearing a dark blue jacket and a patterned scarf, carrying a large black backpack. The man on the right has blonde hair, a beard, and is wearing a grey hoodie over a dark blue shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the right. The background consists of trees with green and yellow leaves. Overlaid on the image are decorative elements: a thick pink curved line on the left, a purple horizontal bar on the right, and a grey horizontal bar at the bottom right.

How to seek therapy

How to seek therapy

If you've recognised any of the R.A.I.S.E. symptoms in yourself, then it might be time to seek professional support in the form of a qualified counsellor or therapist. Counsellors are trained to deal with a range of situations, and offer a safe, confidential, non-judgemental place to talk to a professional about your mental health concerns. A therapist will help you explore your thoughts, feelings and behaviours, helping you to understand yourself better and make positive changes in your life. Seeking help and support is a sign of strength, and there are resources available to assist you in managing and overcoming the struggles you may be facing.

Depending on your circumstances, you may be able to get counselling through the NHS, health insurance, or through charities and voluntary services. These services are often free, but they may have long waiting lists.

Or you can find a private practitioner. You will have a wider choice and should be able to see someone quickly and for longer, but you will most likely have to pay for their services.

You can access therapy through:

The NHS

Speak to your GP. They can help you decide what type of therapy may be best for you. They will know what is available locally and may be able to refer you under the NHS or other local services.

At work

Your employer may offer a confidential Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or be able to refer you through an occupational health service. These programmes are designed to help employees with personal or work-related problems that may be having an impact on their job performance, health and mental wellbeing.

In education

Many colleges and universities have free and confidential in-house counselling services. You can usually find out what they offer and how to make an appointment through your university or college website.

Charities and voluntary services

Some voluntary or community organisations and charities offer free or affordable access to talking therapies. The services available locally will depend on where you live.

Private therapists

Private therapists' charges can vary, starting from around £35 an hour. Costs are subject to location, availability and demand. Some counsellors offer a free initial assessment and reduced costs.

How to encourage the men in your life to go to therapy

If you know a man in your life is going through a difficult time, it can be hard to know how best to help them. You may feel that they need support and assistance beyond what you can provide. Here are some ways you can give support and find the right kind of help for them.

- **Start a conversation:** Starting a conversation about offering men help can be difficult but you can start by asking simple questions, such as: Would you like to talk? Is there something I can help with? It seems like you're going through a difficult time, maybe I can help you to find the right help?
- **Show your support:** Supporting the men in your life by letting them know you're there to help can bring you together. You could try expressing your concern and reassuring them that you care, asking questions, listening to their ideas and being responsive when they talk about their problems and reminding them that help is available and that problems can be solved.
- **Maintain their trust:** Though it may be obvious to you that someone you know needs professional help, there are many reasons why they may refuse or be reluctant to seek help. You may feel frustrated if you think they're not trying hard enough to get well but try not to make assumptions about how they feel. Treat them with respect, compassion and empathy, and try not to rush things.



How to find a qualified therapist

Ensure you choose a qualified counsellor. Choosing a therapist who is registered with a professional body, such as BACP, means they are qualified and work to set professional standards and ethics.

You can use our online directory to find a qualified therapist, filtering by type of therapy you'd like, therapist location, and whether you'd like the therapy to be online or face to face.

Do some independent research into the therapist by searching their website. Don't be afraid to ask them questions about their qualifications, training and specialist areas of expertise and experience. You need to find a therapist who you feel comfortable with and who is the right fit for you.

The bond you have with your therapist sits at the core of the therapeutic process so it's important it feels right. Be mindful that finding the right therapist can take time and it's OK to explore different options.





Further information

To find qualified therapists,
search the BACP directory [here](#).

To find out more about different
types of therapy click [here](#).