

## 7 Mental health apps and computer programs

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# 7 Mental health apps and computer programs



The move towards smartphones and tablets in recent years has seen an inflation of apps and programs designed to support people with mental health problems. These self-help applications can be a cost-effective method for delivering basic mental health and wellbeing information and support. An obvious virtue of mental health apps and programs is that they can be downloaded, often for free, and used flexibly in the users' own time and geographic location.

Keeping track of the plethora of mobile phone apps and programs developed each year can be difficult. They are usually manualised and highly structured, often providing computerised cognitive behavioural therapy (CCBT). They are presented in a range of ways and include animations, graphics, videos, interactive episodes, homework assignments and access to supplementary resources.

One way to find apps that can be trusted and are safe to use is to look for [mental health apps in the NHS Apps Library](#). Any apps listed here meet NHS standards, which include evidence of clinical safety, security and technical stability. (You can find more information on the assessment process/criteria on the NHS library website.)

## Activity 19: NHS library of mental health apps

Allow approximately 30 minutes

[Go to the NHS Apps Library](#) and explore which mobile phone-based apps are available there for people with mental health problems.

Download one of the free apps available and try it out.

## Pause for reflection

Think about your experience of using the app. Is this something that could be useful for any of your clients? Can you imagine recommending any of these programs, either on their own or to complement the counselling you provide?

## 7.1 Risks and challenges of mental health apps and

## computer programs

In practice, the quality and effectiveness of some mental health apps can be questioned. As with the internet more generally, there are no rules or limitations as to what providers can offer online – there's no requirement to demonstrate beneficial outcomes, for instance – and there is no real protection for clients from fraud and deceit.

### Activity 20: Risks and challenges

Allow approximately 10 minutes

Listen to the BBC journalist Jordan Dunbar talking about the risks and challenges of mental health apps and computer programs with Dr Terry Hanley and Fiona Ballantine-Dykes, Deputy CEO of BACP.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Having listened to the clip, drag the following statements into the right place. Click the 'Reveal answer' button when you are done to see if you got the right answers.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

The rapid changes and developments in this area are clearly not without problems for clients and practitioners. At the time of writing, many apps and programs that are freely available have not been formally evaluated; the few that have are often not easily accessible. If you're employing technology-based support, it is therefore important to rely on apps and programs that have been evaluated, and follow the advice of recommended providers (Bennion et al., 2017).

You should now move on to [Topic 8: End-of-course quiz](#).