



Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Facial Palsy

# MANAGING YOUR MOOD



Oxford Facial  
Palsy Service



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# WHAT IS LOW MOOD AND DEPRESSION?

We can all have times when we feel sad, low or miserable. When a person has these feelings for several weeks, and it stops them from being able to get on with their day-to-day life, they may be experiencing an episode of depression.

The term depression describes when somebody is feeling **low in mood**. Research suggests that around **30%** of people with facial palsy will experience symptoms of depression.

## Depression can be associated with the following symptoms:

### Emotions or feelings

- Feeling sad or tearful
- Feeling hopeless and helpless
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling irritable and intolerant of others

### Thoughts

- Having low confidence/self-esteem
- Thinking negatively about yourself
- Thinking that the worst will happen
- Not seeing the point of things
- Poor memory/concentration
- Thoughts of suicide

### Behaviour

- Not being motivated to carry out tasks
- Not doing things that you used to enjoy
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Not doing well at work
- Avoiding contact with friends

### Physical symptoms

- Moving more slowly than usual
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of energy
- Sleep problems

If you recognise many of the symptoms above, then you may be experiencing a period of depression. Developing facial palsy, having treatment and/or adjusting to changes in appearance and facial function (e.g. ability to speak, eat and drink) can often be very distressing and disruptive for people with facial palsy and their families. **Depression is not a sign of personal failure; it is a common emotional reaction to challenging experiences.**

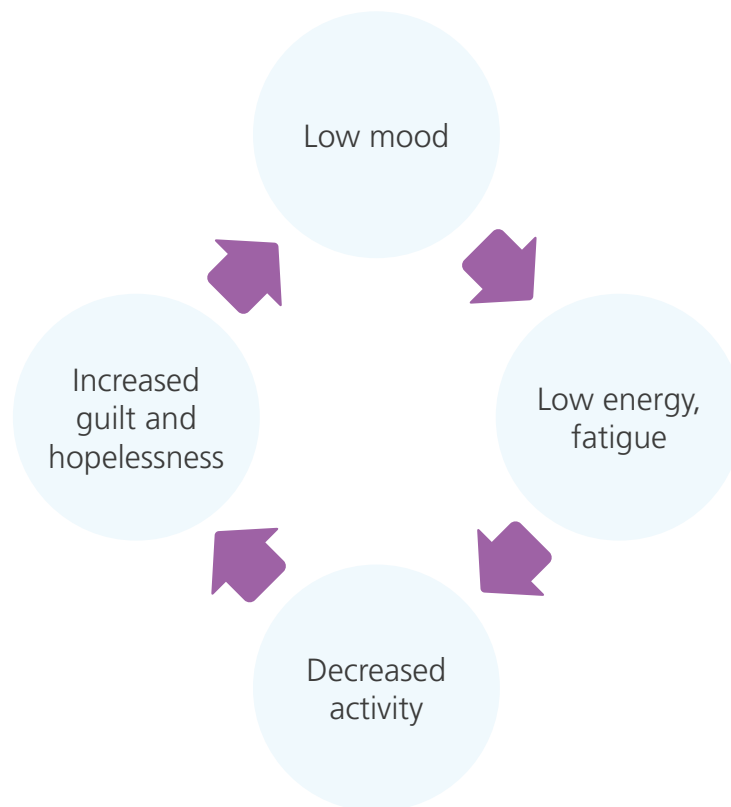
There is **no single cause** of why someone feel might feel depressed after developing facial palsy. Negative beliefs about the duration, timeline and consequences of facial palsy can all contribute to feeling low and sad. Interestingly, **the severity of facial palsy is always not a good predictor of how someone's mood might be affected.** Changes in relationships, other stressful life events and a lack of support from friends and family can also trigger a period of depression.

This guide is designed to provide you with information and help you manage any symptoms of depression. It is based on current research about the best ways for helping people to manage their mood.

# THE 'NEGATIVE CYCLE' OF DEPRESSION

When people develop facial palsy they often experience a great number of **difficult changes**. These can include changes to the **way they look** and how they are able to **eat, drink** and **speak**. In addition to this, some people with facial palsy (such as those with Ramsay Hunt syndrome) may experience high levels of **pain**, even after their facial appearance has returned to normal. These factors often have a very understandable impact on a person's mood and can result in the following pattern:

## Changes, including appearance, function and pain



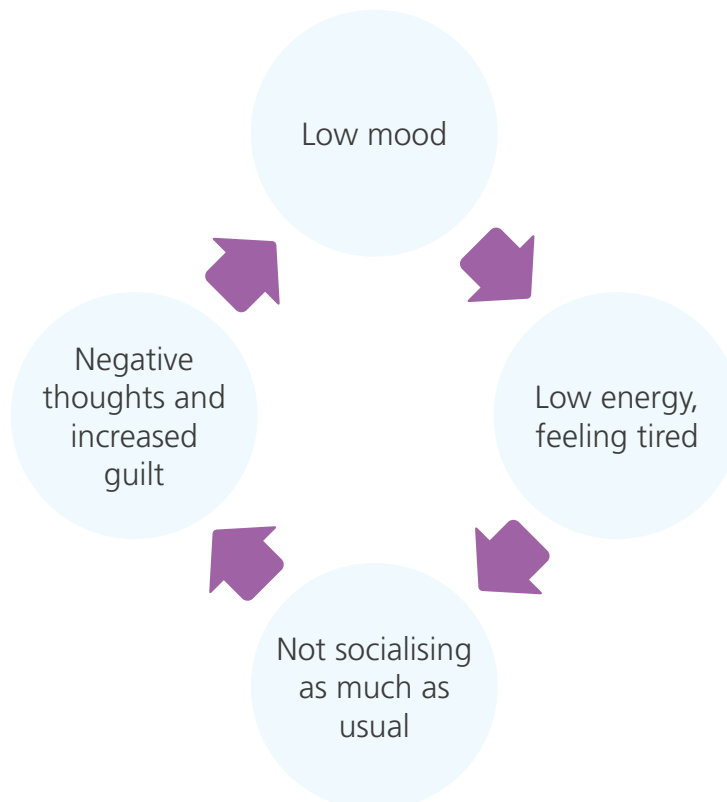
## We can see how this pattern develops by looking at the story of Jessica:

### **Jessica, aged 62**

Jessica developed Bell's palsy four months ago. As time has gone on, Jessica has become less optimistic about her recovery and she often feels upset when thinking about her condition. She notices that things that she previously enjoyed, such as spending time with friends, no longer feel important. She often has the thought "What is the point? No one will want to spend time with me looking like this".

As a result, she avoids seeing her friends, but feels sad about this and gives herself a hard time for not being a better friend. This understandably makes her mood even worse, resulting in her having even less energy and confidence to socialise.

## Jessica's negative cycle:



Just as was the case for Jessica, research tells us that when people are feeling depressed, the **thoughts they have about themselves can have a big impact on how they act and how they feel.**

People with facial palsy might feel worried about their appearance and health. This can lead them to stop doing things they previously enjoyed, such as socialising, which causes a further knock-on effect on their mood. Withdrawing from activities can have a big impact on someone's mood, as they are **no longer doing the things they value and enjoy.** This has a further impact on energy levels, leading to even more withdrawal.

**One of the most effective ways of overcoming depression is to break this negative cycle by becoming more active.**

# BECOMING MORE ACTIVE

Just as being inactive has a negative impact on your mood, energy levels and motivation, becoming more active can make you feel better by:

- taking your mind off painful feelings and your facial palsy
- helping you to feel in control of your life
- helping you to have a sense of achievement
- making you feel less tired
- making you feel more motivated.

**The more you do, the better you feel.  
The better you feel, the more you feel  
able to do.**

If you are recovering from a viral infection, such as Ramsay Hunt Syndrome, you may find yourself feeling fatigued. It can be important to not push yourself too hard physically. There is further information in the Pacing section of this guide.

# VALUES

Let's think back to Jessica. One of the things that she values the most is being a good friend. Since developing facial palsy she has found it harder to spend time with her friends, meaning she is no longer living her life in line with this value, with understandable effects on her mood.

An important first step towards becoming more active is to identify which activities are in line with your values. Your values are the things which you believe are most important in your life. They give life meaning and purpose. We can become low in mood when we no longer take part in activities that are in line with our values.

Values are different from goals. Goals can be achieved, while values are more like our life direction, or a compass that guides us.

There are 10 domains below which are commonly valued by people. For each one, write a brief description of your values. For example, Jessica would write 'To be a good friend and spend regular time with friends' as her value for the 'Friendships/social life' domain.

Rate each domain on a 0-10 scale for **how important that domain is** and also for **how you are currently living your life according to this value**.

Domain	Value	Domain	Value
Family	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10	Physical exercise	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10
Marriage/ intimate relationships	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10	Spirituality	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10
Parenting	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10	Hobbies	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10
Friendships/ social life	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10	Education/ learning	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10
Local community	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10	Employment/ career	How important ...../10 How I am currently living my life ...../10



# LIVING YOUR VALUES

Now that you have thought about your values, it is time to think about which activities you can take part in that are in line with your values. For some people, having facial palsy can make it more challenging to take part in certain activities. For example, Jessica really values socialising with her friends, but finds this challenging due to her worries about her appearance. **It can be helpful to start with the least challenging activities and slowly work towards carrying out the more challenging ones.**

**This is demonstrated by the example of James below:**

## **James, aged 59**

*James developed Ramsay Hunt syndrome seven months ago. He has weakness on the left side of his face, which affects his speech. He also experiences pain in his face and head, for which he regularly takes painkillers.*

*James works as a gardener and really values his work, but has not felt able to return to work since the onset of his symptoms.*

*James believes that exercise is very important and previously enjoyed taking long walks in the countryside with his wife and dog, but does not feel that he has enough energy at the moment.*

*James is very close with his brother, but does not speak with him on the phone as much as he used to, because he dislikes how his voice sounds on the phone since developing speech difficulties.*

## **James' list of possible activities:**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Ranking (easiest = 1, hardest = 10)</b>	<b>Completed?</b>
<i>Spending 30 minutes doing some weeding</i>	8	Yes No
<i>Sending my brother an email</i>	1	Yes No
<i>Going for a 15 minute walk with the dog</i>	5	Yes No
<i>Video-calling my brother</i>	6	Yes No
<i>Walking to the shop at the end of the road</i>	3	Yes No
<i>Planting some seeds</i>	2	Yes No
<i>Going for a long walk in the countryside</i>	9	Yes No
<i>Arranging a time to meet me brother</i>	10	Yes No
<i>Mowing the lawn</i>	7	Yes No
<i>Calling my brother on the phone</i>	4	Yes No

## Potential activities that are living my values

Try and list 10 possible activities that you could do. Rank these in order, from easiest (1) to hardest (10), and tick them off when you have done them. Try and have a mixture of physical exercises, social activities and hobbies, focusing on planning things that you value and are simple

Rate each domain on a 0-10 scale for ***how important that domain is*** and also for ***how you are currently living your life according to this value.***

Activity	Ranking (easiest = 1, hardest = 10)	Completed?	
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No
		Yes	No

Once you know what activities, exercises, chores or hobbies you could be doing, it can be helpful to make a plan for when you are going to carry them out. Using a timetable like the one below, try to think of at least one activity to carry out each morning, afternoon and evening.

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

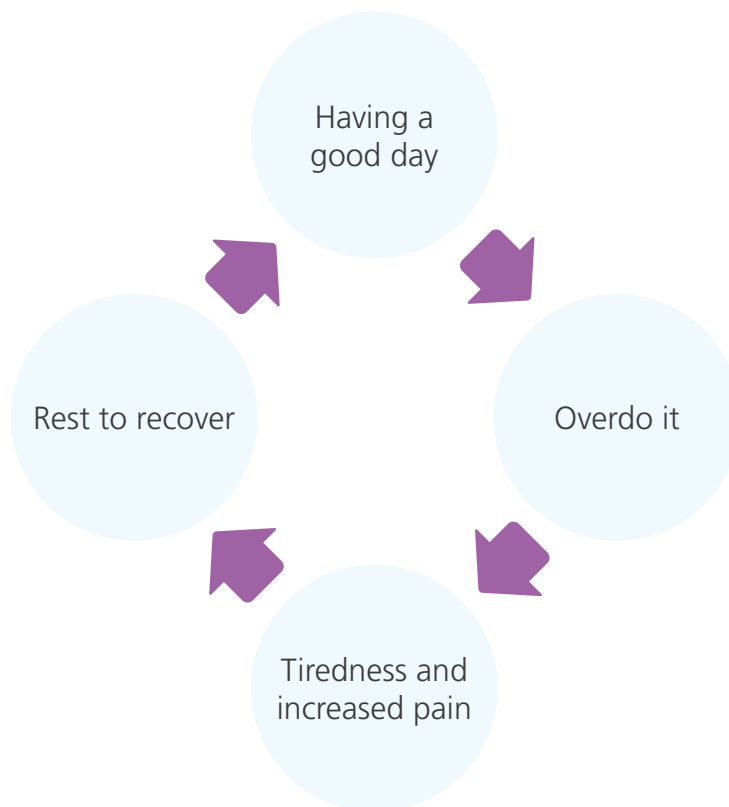
Some people can find it hard to fit additional activities into their morning, afternoon and/or evening routine. If you are at work all day can be helpful to carry out activities or participate in hobbies in the evening which are separate from your work. Try and make time for different types of activities. It is helpful to carry out a variety of activities, including those which give you a sense of **achievement**, a high level of **enjoyment** and/or **connection with other people**.

# PACING

Do you find that you have good days and bad days? This is often because its easy to do too much on days when you feel a little better. This can cause strain on muscles and can generally be tiring. Some people with facial palsy experience pain and this can also be made worse by doing too much.

Too much activity and/or pain may make you more likely to need to rest the next day; however, too much rest can make it even harder to be active. This 'Boom-Bust' pattern is very common and over time can make you become more tired and weak, leading you to do less and less.

## Jessica's negative cycle:



You can avoid this pattern by **pacing**, which means taking a break **before** you think you actually need to. By keeping your activity levels up, but not over-doing it (i.e. stopping an activity before you feel tired) and taking regular breaks, you will notice that you can slowly and gradually increase your activity levels.

# PROBLEM SOLVING

Living with any sort of health condition can be challenging. Some people with facial palsy describe often worrying about their condition (such as 'What if it never improves?' or 'Why did this happen to me?').

When our mind is full of negative thoughts we can sometime feel overwhelmed, and this makes it harder to solve problems. Decisions which previously may have felt straightforward can feel harder, and when you are feeling low in mood problems can seem bigger than they really are.

## A step-by-step approach can help to make problem-solving more simple:

- Write down the problem.
- List all potential solutions, however helpful or unhelpful they seem! It can sometimes be helpful to think about the advice that you would give to a friend in a similar situation.
- List the advantages and disadvantages of these different solutions.
- Choose the best solution.
- Think about the steps you need to take to put this solution into action.
- Review whether the solution was helpful.

### **Yasmin, aged 37**

*Yasmin developed Bell's palsy 10 months ago. She has always valued her appearance and so now often feels very upset about the way she looks. For the last 2 months she has been feeling low in mood and does not have the energy to carry out many of the activities she previously enjoyed.*

*Yasmin's Facial Therapist has provided her with a rehabilitation program, to help keep her facial muscles mobile and healthy, and also to develop balanced facial movements.*

*Unfortunately, Yasmin often forgets to carry out these techniques and even when she does remember to do them she does not feel like she has the energy to carry them out.*

<b>Yasmin's problem:</b> Forgetting to carry out facial therapy techniques				
<b>Potential solutions</b>	<b>Advantages of this solution</b>	<b>Disadvantages of this solution</b>	<b>Rank in order of probable usefulness (1=most useful)</b>	<b>What do you need to do to put this solution into action?</b>
<i>Putting post-it notes on mirrors</i>	<i>There are lots of mirrors at home</i>	<i>I don't really like looking in the mirror</i>	1	<i>I look in the bathroom mirror when I brush my teeth. Put a list of exercises on the mirror and complete before brushing my teeth</i>
<i>Setting a phone reminder</i>	<i>I always have my phone on me</i>	<i>The reminder might go off when I'm busy</i>	3	
<i>Asking husband to remind me</i>	<i>He wants to help me and he helps me stay motivated</i>	<i>He might forget and I might get cross at him for 'nagging'</i>	2	

### **Yasmin (revisited)**

*Yasmin decided to put a post-it note on the bathroom mirror. Although at first this reminded her to do her facial rehabilitation, she soon lost motivation. She went through the problem solving process again and decided that she might feel more motivated to carry out her facial rehabilitation if her husband was with her at the same time.*

*She continued to use post-it notes to remind herself to complete her facial rehabilitation and at the same time asked her husband to join her in the bathroom. This helped her to feel supported and motivated, especially when he commented on the improvements that she had made with her rehabilitation.*

Now it's your turn! Choose one problem you currently have. What solutions might there be?

<b>My problem:</b>				
<b>Potential solutions</b>	<b>Advantages of this solution</b>	<b>Disadvantages of this solution</b>	<b>Rank in order of probable usefulness (1=most useful)</b>	<b>What do you need to do to put this solution into action?</b>

After you have tested out your solution, review whether it has been helpful. If the solution was not helpful, repeat the problem solving process until you find an effective solution.

It might also be helpful to talk to a family member or friend, to identify other potential solutions. If your problem is related to your recovery from facial palsy, it might be helpful to talk to a member of your NHS facial palsy care team.

# UNHELPFUL THINKING

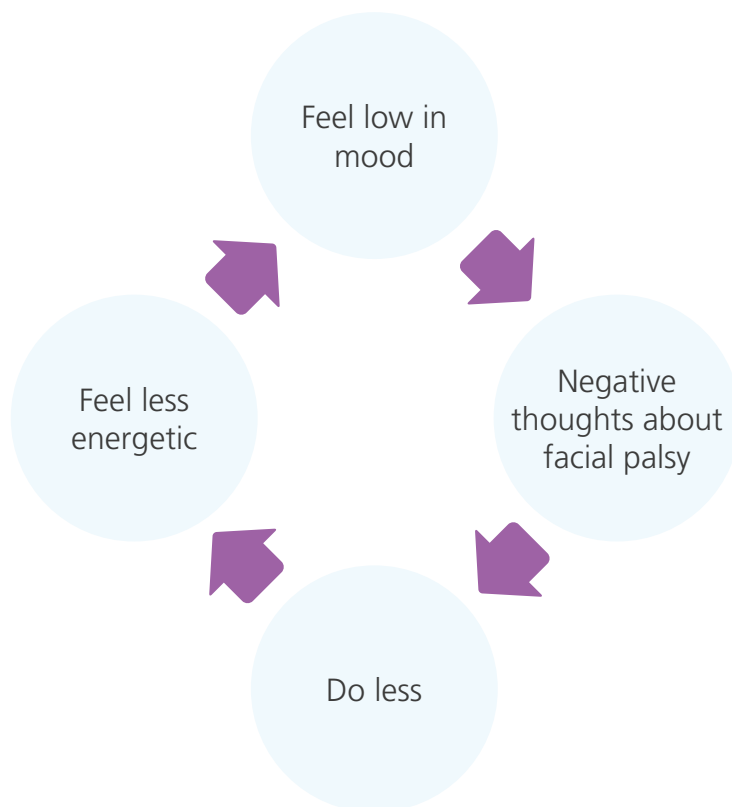
People experiencing low mood or depression **often think in a negative and unhelpful way.**

People with facial palsy who are low in mood sometimes have thoughts like:

- “What’s the point? Things will never improve”
- “I can’t face going out”
- “Everybody will be looking at me”
- “Why did this have to happen to me?”

These types of thoughts can have a big impact on your activity levels, which often leads to further negative and self-critical thoughts, such as “I’ve become lazy”. Such thoughts will only make you feel even worse, creating a negative cycle:

## Facial palsy:





# COMMON UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

There are several types of thoughts that people with facial palsy have when they are feeling low. These are described below. Do you sometimes think in any of these ways?

<b>Type of thought:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Do you ever have this type of thought? Give examples:</b>
Ignoring the positive	Only focusing on negative or bad events. For example, focusing on the one time in your otherwise good day when somebody stared at you.	
Black and white thinking	Not seeing the 'middle-ground' – things are either perfect or a total failure. For example, "I can't ever eat in front of people, it's too embarrassing".	
Catastrophising	Jumping to the worst possible conclusion, rather than seeing things for how they really are. For example, thinking: "My appearance will never improve".	
Over-generalising	This is when we come to a conclusion based on one small thing, for example thinking: "I am lazy" because you haven't been as active as usual.	
Mind-reading	Believing that we know what others are thinking, for example "Everyone thinks I've had a stroke".	
Fortune telling	Predicting that something negative will occur before it even happens, for example "No one will talk to me because of my face".	

**It can also be helpful to challenge some of your negative thoughts.**

You might ask yourself:

- What is the evidence for and against this thought?
- What would I say to a friend who was thinking like this?
- Is there another, more accurate way that I could view the situation?
- Am I ignoring any positive information?
- Am I falling into a thinking trap?
- How helpful is this way of thinking?

In order to come up with a more helpful, balanced thought, it can also be helpful to weigh up the evidence for and against your negative thoughts.

Remember Jessica from earlier? She tried this approach, to help her challenge her negative thought that “No one will want to spend time with me”.

<b>Situation:</b>	<b>Unhelpful thought: (strength of thought %)</b>	<b>Emotion: (strength of emotion %)</b>	<b>Evidence of my thought</b>	<b>Evidence against my thought:</b>	<b>More balanced thought: (strength %)</b>	<b>Emotion: (new strength %)</b>
Deciding whether to meet up with friends.	Nobody will want to spend time with me (80%)	Sad (85%)	People don't like to socialise with people who are in a bad mood. Tony, Steph and Alice haven't been in touch with me.	Lots of friends, including Alex, Steve, Nadia and Clive have texted me, trying to arrange a time to meet. I am probably thinking negatively about socialising because I haven't had much energy lately. I might be falling into the thinking trap of 'mind reading'. I would want to support my friends if they were ill or feeling low. I felt better after speaking to my sister on the phone last week.	My friends will probably want to see me, and although I don't feel like I have the energy to socialise, it may actually help me to feel better (70%)	Sad (30%)

# HAVE A GO YOURSELF

Use this template to practice weighing up the evidence for and against your negative thoughts. Do this every time you find yourself having a negative thought or making a negative prediction. This will help you to create a revised, more balanced thought. Pay attention to whether creating a more balanced thought helps you to feel in a better mood.

<b>Emotion: (new strength %)</b>			
<b>More balanced thought: (strength %)</b>			
<b>Evidence against my thought:</b>			
<b>Evidence of my thought</b>			
<b>Emotion: (strength of emotion %)</b>			
<b>Unhelpful thought: (strength of thought %)</b>			
<b>Situation:</b>			

# LOW MOOD, SUICIDE AND/OR SELF-HARM

Many people who are feeling depressed find they have thoughts of harming themselves or wanting to die. If you feel so depressed that you have been having thoughts of harming yourself or taking your own life, contact your GP as soon as possible and talk about how you are feeling. Your GP will have one number between 'office hours', and a separate 'out of hours' number. These numbers will be available on their website.

It can also be helpful to talk to the Samaritans for confidential listening support.

You can call them on **116 123** or email [jo@samaritans.org.uk](mailto:jo@samaritans.org.uk).

They are open 24 hours a day, every day.

# SUMMARY

It is common to notice that having facial palsy can have a negative impact on mood. The following strategies can be helpful:

- Understand the negative cycle of depression and how it applies to you.
- Try to increase your activity levels (but don't over-exhaust yourself).
- Problem-solve difficult problems.
- Notice and challenge your unhelpful thoughts.
- Contact your GP if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or are struggling to make use of the ideas in this guide.





## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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