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Altered sensations psychology service
Information for patients

Leaflet number: 4753/VER1
Date published: June 2019
Review date: June 2022
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A list of sources is available on request
Introduction
Altered sensations in the mouth arise from a number of interacting systems in the body and our multi-disciplinary team works together to provide treatment for all areas of your wellbeing that your symptoms impact.

The oral medicine team includes consultants, clinical fellows, clinical psychologists and specialist nurses.

Psychology in oral medicine
If you suffer from altered oral sensations that cause you distress, you are not alone. Our psychologists are experienced in working with patients to reduce the physical and emotional impact of their oral condition on their lives.

This can help people to move forward and feel optimistic about the future.

Many patients' first reaction to being referred to a psychologist is to worry the referrer thinks that their symptoms are not real. In fact it shows that the referrer is aware of how difficult their condition can be to live with. Psychological help can improve your ability to cope with your condition.

How can psychology help?
Oro-facial symptoms can affect people in many ways, not just physically. You may worry about the symptoms you experience. This worry may lead you to stop or reduce work, social life or hobbies, because the discomfort feels too strong and you feel you can no longer manage these situations. This can lead to feelings of anger, frustration, low mood and a loss of confidence.

Psychological support is designed to support patients' coping ability, and to reduce the negative impact of their symptoms on their lives.

Assessment appointment
After referral, you will be seen individually for assessment. This leaflet gives you information about your appointment. You are welcome to bring someone with you if you wish.

The clinical psychologist will discuss your goals with you, and together you will decide on the next step. You will attend an information group session. After this, you may need more input in the form of stress, fatigue or pain management, or attentional focus sessions. Your individual pathway will be decided with you at your assessment.

What do information group sessions involve?
These sessions give the information necessary to understand your condition fully to help you learn to manage it. These one-off sessions last two hours and run every month. The information group sessions include 6-10 patients who all suffer from similar symptoms. Group treatment has been shown to be effective for chronic conditions.

What is ACT?
The psychologists in oral medicine use acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). This is part of the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) family of therapies. ACT teaches acceptance and mindfulness skills, along with encouraging healthy behavioural change. This focuses on developing behaviour that will help you to cope in challenging situations.

Distressing sensations, thoughts, beliefs and rules about conditions and symptoms can reduce our ability to cope. Increasing psychological flexibility helps you to feel more confident in managing your symptoms. You may begin to experience improvements in your mood, social life, fitness, and your ability to do activities despite your symptoms.

The sessions include topics on:
- how thinking patterns impact behaviour
- techniques to reduce the dominance and importance of unhelpful thinking patterns
- acceptance of unwanted feelings
- engaging in goal-directed action
- mindfulness
- improving sleep.

As well as attending group sessions, you will need to practise what you learn between each session. In general, the more you practice self-management strategies, the more you will gain.
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