

Online treatment to help young people tackle depression, anxiety and worry

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An online treatment proven to prevent anxiety and depression in young people is set to become available to the NHS and other mental health services worldwide.

The University of Exeter has developed and tested an effective internet-delivered treatment to tackle worry and overthinking called "rumination-focused [cognitive behavioural therapy](#)" (RFCBT), which helps people switch from unconstructive, repetitive thoughts to a concrete, specific and action-oriented style.

The effectiveness of online RFCBT has been demonstrated in two [clinical trials](#) in [young people](#) who worry a lot.

In one study in high-worrying 15-24-year-olds, online RFCBT halved the onset of clinical depression and generalised anxiety disorder over the next year. In a second study in UK undergraduates, online RFCBT reduced the onset of major depression by over 50% over the next 15 months for the most stressed students.

The treatment has now been licensed to eHealth company Minddistrict, to be made available to health providers under the name MindReSolve.

It is currently Mental Health Awareness Week and—with many people worldwide in lockdown due to COVID-19—online treatments like MindReSolve could be particularly important to make treatment more accessible

"We know that worrying and overthinking are [risk factors](#) for poor mental health," said Professor Ed Watkins, of the University of Exeter.

"High levels of worry and overthinking increase the risk of developing depression and anxiety disorders, especially in young people.

"Worry is also likely to be elevated due to the uncertainties arising from COVID-19.

"However, from our lab research, we know that it is possible to shift

people from unhelpful worry into more useful problem-solving. We have built these techniques into the online treatment.

"Our research has shown that online RFCBT is effective. We now hope this evidence-based treatment will become more widely available to patients via the Minddistrict platform."

MindReSolve, is designed for young people aged 15 or over to use themselves, or as "guided self-help" supported by a mental health professional.

Access to the treatment is through a health care provider such as a NHS Trust or university well-being service, a number of which already use the Minddistrict platform.

"The goal is for the client to learn about the patterns of their worry, rumination and overthinking and to find ways to tackle them—as a means to reduce and prevent stress, anxiety and depression," Professor Watkins added.

"The client learns about the warning signs for worry and rumination, and useful helpful alternative behaviours to disrupt worry and rumination.

"In addition, the client learns how to shift from unhelpful to helpful thinking when faced with difficulties and problems.

"All six sessions include psycho-education, questionnaires to help the client to reflect on the ideas raised, videos to watch and audio-recorded exercises to practice such as relaxation, compassion, absorption and being more specific."

The licensing of this intervention to Minddistrict was supported by Tori Hammond in the research commercialisation team in Innovation, Impact

and Business at the University of Exeter.

Eva Papadopoulou, Business Lead UK at Minddistrict, said: "We are delighted to have had the opportunity to collaborate with the University of Exeter on their MindResolve module, which has seen excellent results during its randomised controlled trial.

"We're excited to have this module as part of the Minddistrict catalogue of online interventions and are looking forward to helping both our existing customers and [potential partners](#) with getting the most out of this module for their clients."

More information: psychology.exeter.ac.uk/smartlab/

Provided by University of Exeter

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