# Realist literature review of computerised cognitive behavioural therapy (cCBT) for prevention and early intervention in anxiety and depression

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*Theme: The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of online intervention*

**Objective:** Computerised CBT is an accepted treatment for anxiety and depression. There is now a public health focus on the prevention and early management of these conditions. Internet-delivered approaches appear promising as a cost-effective way of reaching a large population for what are sensitive and stigmatised conditions. Prevention of mental illness and use of cCBT are both fields new in development. We sought to systematically review the relevant literature.

**Methodology:** A realist review method was used as it provides a more flexible and pluralistic approach to deconstructing complex interventions, allowing us to examine all relevant literature. A structured search methodology was developed and key medical databases searched.

**Results:** We found very different papers invesitgating whether cCBT works in prevention and early treatment. Only five specifically considered cCBT in the prevention of depression and anxiety, providing mixed results.

There were further papers on cCBT as a community-based, sub-clinical treatment rather than specifically for prevention. These vary hugely in terms of method, cCBT package, population and conditions treated. Outcomes are generally positive. Research was mostly on high risk groups rather than the general population. Terminology and definitions varied between and within papers.

**Conclusions:** cCBT in prevention and early management of mental illness is a new but promising field. Technology offers a new delivery platform for reaching individuals at different illness stages, confidentially and accessibly. cCBT can reduce symptoms in sub-clinical populations, including spontaneous Internet users, but adherence and attrition rates are a challenge. More research is needed.

[245 words]