

Recognising When to Refer a Client or Patient to a Psychologist

Signs a Client or Patient May Benefit from Psychological Support

Psychological & Emotional Signs:

- Persistent low mood, sadness or tearfulness
- High anxiety, especially about body, appointments, future, social situations
- Shame, body hatred, or feelings of worthlessness
- Hopelessness or helplessness (“Nothing works”, “What’s the point?”)
- Ruminating thoughts, low self-esteem or difficulty coping
- Difficulty accepting or adjusting to the diagnosis

Behavioural Signs:

- Withdrawal from care (missed appointments, disengagement)
- Overcompliance or “perfect patient” behaviour that leads to burnout
- Difficulty engaging with self-care
- Disordered eating patterns or fixation on body/weight
- Extreme focus on weight loss, diet or exercise to the exclusion of other priorities

Verbal Clues:

- “I hate my body”, “I can’t talk to anyone about this”, “Nothing helps, and no one listens”
- “I feel broken” or “No one understands”
- “I used to be confident... now I don’t leave the house”

Surgery:

- Client is considering surgery
- Client is having surgery

Red Flags for Urgent Referral:

- Suicidal thoughts or expressions of hopelessness – “They’d be better off without me”
- Self-harm or trauma symptoms (flashbacks, dissociation, panic)
- Extreme distress that interferes with function

Accessing Support Through Medicare (Better Access Program)

Under the Better Access initiative, eligible individuals can access up to 10 Medicare-subsidised sessions per calendar year with a psychologist. Access begins with a Mental Health Treatment Plan and referral created by a GP. Sessions can be in person or via telehealth – phone or video.

How to Gently Suggest a Referral

“A lot of people I work with find it helpful to talk to a psychologist — not because something is wrong with them, but because living with this is a lot to carry”.