

## PBS Helpline Resources

### Supporting physical health

People with learning disabilities experience health inequalities. They are more likely to have physical health problems, but less likely to get the help they need. Because of this, people with learning disabilities often die younger due to lack of access to healthcare. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Services are not aimed at people with learning disabilities
- Healthcare professionals may not have the skills to understand and meet the needs of people with learning disabilities
- People with learning disabilities may struggle to describe their symptoms
- Professionals may make assumptions and put symptoms down to the learning disability
- The person may have previous negative experience which prevents them from accessing healthcare
- People with learning disabilities are less likely to access preventative programmes like the cancer screening programme.

All of this can lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment.

People with learning disabilities suffer from health problems like anyone else. Health problems impact on our sleep, eating and drinking, concentration, energy, mood and behaviour. In people with learning disabilities, this is often wrongly labelled as challenging behaviour.

Any change in behaviour, whether challenging or not, is communication. If someone's behaviour changes, consider whether they may be in pain or unwell. If you think someone may be unwell or in pain, always seek medical advice.

Some things to consider are:

- Constipation (changes in toileting patterns or signs of discomfort)
- Urine (more or less frequent, change in colour or smell, incontinence)
- Teeth (when did the person last have a dental check?)
- Ears (has the hearing changed? Any signs of discomfort?)
- Reflux (does behaviour change before or after eating? Do they feel sick?)
- PLUS do they seem to be in pain? Have other health issues (such as epilepsy) changed?