



Taking charge of  
**your mental health.**

## You can take charge of your mental health.

Mental illnesses are conditions that can affect the way you think, the way you feel, your mood or your behavior. They include depression, anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and personality, psychotic and eating disorders. These conditions may happen once in a while or can be long-lasting (chronic) and affect the way you relate to others and act each day.



Mental health problems have nothing to do with being lazy or weak. Most people need help to get better. Many things can contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Genes, physical illness, injury or brain chemistry.
- Life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse.
- Family history of mental health problems.

Most people with mental health problems can get better. But the first step is getting help.

### 5 simple steps to help you take charge:



# 1



## Check with your doctor.



If you think you might have a mental illness (or if you just want to find out if you're at risk for one), check with your doctor or primary care provider (PCP). He or she can connect you with a mental health expert that can help. There are a few different types you can choose from.



### **Mental health experts.**

Counselors, therapists, clinical social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists are all experts in mental health. But they have different levels of education and some offer different mental health services.

When looking for mental health care, you may also hear the term “behavioral health.” It refers to everything you'd think of as mental health, like help for struggles around conditions like depression and anxiety and challenges like grief and addiction.



### **Therapists and counselors.**

Therapists and counselors are both experts who use talk therapy techniques to help their clients. That includes resolving problem beliefs, changing behaviors, improving emotional outlooks and more.



### **Clinical social workers.**

Clinical social workers focus on figuring out and treating mental health issues. Like therapists and counselors, clinical social workers can help work families through challenging experiences like divorce. They can also treat mental health conditions like depression.



### **Nurses.**

Nurses with advanced education provide a wide range of mental health services, including therapy and sometimes medication management. They're called mental health nurse practitioners or psychiatric nurse practitioners.



### **Psychologists and psychiatrists.**

Like a counselor or therapist, psychologists can identify mental health and create a treatment plan. They have doctoral degrees but are not medical doctors. Psychologists can't prescribe medicine. A psychiatrist is a medical doctor (MD) who can do everything a psychologist can, plus prescribe medicine.

# 2



## Know your illness.

People can experience different types of mental health problems. These problems can affect your thinking, mood and behavior. Mental illnesses can happen over a short period of time or they can come and go with disconnected beginnings and endings. Mental illness can also be ongoing or long-lasting.

There are more than 200 types of mental illness. Here are a few of the main types of mental illness and disorders.

### **Anxiety disorders.**

Having anxiety once in a while is an expected part of life. You might feel anxious when faced with a problem at work, before taking a test or before making an important decision. But anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time.

The symptoms can get in the way of daily activities like job performance, schoolwork and relationships. There are several types of anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder and various phobia-related disorders.

### **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.**

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common childhood mental disorders. It can continue through teenage years and into adulthood. People who have ADHD may have trouble paying attention, act without thinking or be overly active.

### **Disruptive behavioral disorders.**

Behavioral disorders include a pattern of disruptive behaviors in kids that last for at least 6 months and cause problems in school, at home and in public. These symptoms can also continue into adulthood.



### **Depression and other mood disorders.**

While bad moods are common and usually pass, people suffering from depression and other mood disorders live with more constant and severe symptoms. People living with depression find that their mood impacts both mental and psychological well-being, nearly every day, and often for much of the day.

It's estimated that 1 in 10 adults suffer from some type of mood disorder. The most common conditions are depression and bipolar disorder. With the right diagnosis and treatment, you can lead a healthy, normal and productive life. If left untreated, this illness can affect your quality of life and many long-lasting physical health problems like diabetes and heart disease.

### **Eating disorders.**

Eating disorders involve obsessive and sometimes disturbing thoughts and behaviors, including:

- Not eating.
- Eating too much.
- Feelings of depression or discomfort.
- Concern about weight, body shape and poor self-image.

Common types of eating disorders include anorexia, bulimia and binge eating.



### **Personality disorders.**

People with personality disorders have extreme and strong personality traits that cause problems in work, school or other relationships. Personality disorders include antisocial personality disorder and borderline personality disorder.

### **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).**

A person can get PTSD after living through or seeing a traumatic event, like war, a hurricane, physical abuse or a serious accident. PTSD can make someone feel stressed and afraid even after the danger is over. People with PTSD may experience symptoms, like:

- Reliving the event over and over.
- Having problems with sleep.
- Becoming very upset if something causes memories of the event.
- Looking for possible threats all the time.
- Changes in emotions like crankiness, acting out, helplessness or feelings of numbness.

### **Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders.**

People with psychotic disorders hear, see and believe things that aren't real or true. They may also show signs of unorganized thinking, confused speech and muddled or uncommon physical movements. An example of a psychotic disorder is schizophrenia. People with schizophrenia may also have low motivation and flat emotions.

### **Substance use disorders.**

Substance use disorders happen when regular or repeated use of alcohol and/or drugs causes major impairment, like health problems, disability and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school or home. Substance use problems can be deadly to the user or others. Examples include drunk driving deaths and drug overdoses.



According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 25 Americans lives with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression.

# 3



## Know your signs.



There is no single cause for mental illness. A number of things can play a part as a risk for mental illness, like:

- Trauma or a history of abuse that happened early in life (like child abuse, sexual assault or seeing violence).
- Experiences related to other ongoing (chronic) medical conditions, like cancer or diabetes.
- Natural reasons, like genes or chemical imbalances in the brain.
- Use of alcohol or recreational drugs.
- Having few friends or feeling lonely or alone.

### **Chronic illness and depression.**

It's common to feel sad or discouraged after a heart attack, finding out you have cancer or if you have a chronic condition like pain. You may have new limits on what you can do. And you might feel anxious about treatment and what might happen in the future. It might be hard to get used to a new reality and cope with the changes and ongoing treatment that come with a chronic illness. Your favorite activities may be harder to do, like biking or taking long walks.

Temporary feelings of sadness are expected. But, if these and other symptoms last longer than a couple of weeks, you might have depression. Depression affects your ability to carry on with daily life and to enjoy friends, family, work and your free time. The health effects of depression go beyond mood. Depression is a serious medical illness with many symptoms, including physical ones.

- Feeling sad, grumpy, anxious, empty, hopeless, guilty or worthless.
- Loss of energy and feeling weak and lazy.
- Trouble concentrating, remembering details and making decisions.
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease, even with treatment.
- Thoughts of death, suicide or suicide attempts.



According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 50% will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime.

# 4



## Make healthy choices.



### People with other chronic conditions have a higher risk of depression.

The same factors that increase risk of depression in otherwise healthy people also raise the risk in people with other medical illnesses. These risk factors include a personal or family history of depression or loss of family members to suicide.

However, there are some risk factors directly related to having another illness. For example, conditions such as Parkinson's disease and stroke cause changes in the brain. In some cases, these changes may have a direct role in depression. Illness-related anxiety and stress can also trigger symptoms of depression.

Depression is common among people who have chronic illnesses, like:

- Diabetes.
- Epilepsy and multiple sclerosis.
- Stroke.
- Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.
- HIV/AIDS.

Good mental health is necessary to your overall health and well-being. If you do have a mental illness, know that it's common and can be treatable. So much of what we do physically impacts us mentally. It's important to pay attention to both your physical health and your mental health. When you do, it can help your overall wellness and set you on a path to recovery.

A healthy lifestyle can help prevent the occurrence or worsening of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other chronic health problems. It can also play a big role in helping people recover from these conditions. Managing stress, getting enough sleep, staying active and eating healthy are important things to do to help improve your overall health and wellness.



### Manage your stress.

No one likes to be stressed out. Especially when you know it can be linked to poor health. Learning how to manage your stress can be a small change with a big positive impact on your physical and mental health.

Stress is a normal part of life. You can feel stress in your body when you have too much to do or when you haven't slept well. You can also feel stress when you worry about things like your job, money, relationships or a friend or family member who is struggling with illness or difficult times.



### Get enough sleep.

Your physical and emotional health depends so much on how much rest you get. Sleep is necessary to a healthy mind and body. Getting a good night's sleep can make a huge difference in your overall health. Sleep also plays a role in our:

- Moods.
- Ability to learn and make memories.
- The health of our organs.
- How well our immune system works.
- And other bodily functions like appetite, metabolism and hormones.



### Get more exercise.

Staying active can benefit so many areas of your health. And it can even help prevent physical and mental health symptoms from getting worse. It's important to do physical activity every day to make sure your body and your mind are healthy.

You don't have to have a gym membership to make exercise a part of your life. Picking physical activities that you enjoy and are easy to add to your routine is important.



### Improve your nutrition, diet and gut health.

The quality of the food you eat can impact your overall physical and mental health. Eating nutritious foods can go a long way toward achieving a healthy lifestyle.

That gut-wrenching feeling in the pit of your stomach is all too real. Your gut is sensitive to emotions like anger, anxiety, sadness and joy. That means your brain can react to signals from your stomach. Eat a balanced and nutritious diet so your gut and your brain can be healthy.

Diet is also linked to the part of your brain that helps with learning, memory and mental health. So if you have a healthy diet, you can help improve in those areas.



# 5



## Learn how to recover.



### Recovery from mental illness is possible.

Most people with mental health problems can get better. Treatment and recovery is ongoing and will happen over time. The first step is getting help.

### What recovery is.

Recovery from mental disorders and/or substance abuse disorders is a process of change where you can help:

- Improve your health and wellness.
- Live a self-directed life.
- Reach your full potential.

### Four areas of recovery.

There are 4 major areas that help support a life in recovery:

- **Health.** Make informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being.
- **Home.** Have a stable and safe place to live.
- **Purpose.** Take part in meaningful daily activities, like a job or school, volunteering, caring for your family or being creative.
- **Community.** Build relationships and social networks that help provide support.

### Develop a recovery plan.

If you are struggling with a mental health problem, you may want to develop a written recovery plan.

Recovery plans:

- Help you to identify goals for achieving wellness.
- Find out what you can do to reach those goals.
- Include daily activities and longer term goals.
- Track any changes in your mental health.
- Identify triggers or other stressful events that can make you feel worse and help you learn how to manage them.



According to the Centers for Disease Control, there were 65.9 million visits to doctor's offices with mental disorders as the main reason.



## Helpful resources.



### For more information, visit these websites:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
cdc.gov/mentalhealth

**National Institute of Mental Health**  
nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/chronic-illness-mental-health

**Mental Health.gov**  
mentalhealth.gov

**Mental Health Minnesota**  
mentalhealthmn.org/learn-more/mental-health-and-physical-health

**UnitedHealthcare Community Plan**  
myuhc.com/CommunityPlan  
UHCCommunityPlan.com



### Important contacts:

**Doctor's name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pharmacy:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Urgent Care:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Hospital:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**If there's an emergency, call 911.**

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