

NEWSLETTER

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## What is mental health?

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Mental health refers to our cognitive, behavioral, and emotional wellbeing - it is all about how we think, feel, and behave. The term 'mental health' is sometimes used to

mean an absence of a mental disorder.

Mental health can affect daily life, relationships, and even physical health. Mental health also includes a person's ability to enjoy life - to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

In this article, we will explain what is meant by the terms "mental health" and "mental illness." We will also describe the most common types of mental disorder and how they are treated. The article will also cover some early signs of mental health problems.

## Definition



Mental health problems can affect anyone at any age.

According to [Medilexicon's medical dictionary](#), mental health is:

"Emotional, behavioral, and social maturity or normality; the absence of a mental or behavioral disorder; a state of psychological well-being in which one has achieved a satisfactory integration of one's instinctual drives acceptable to both oneself and one's social milieu; an appropriate balance of love, work, and leisure pursuits."

According to the [WHO](#) (World Health Organization), mental health is:

"... a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."

The WHO stresses that mental health "is not just the absence of mental disorder."

## Risk factors

Experts say we all have the potential to develop mental health problems, no matter how old we are, whether we are male or female, rich or poor, or which ethnic group we belong to.

Almost [1 in 5 Americans](#) experiences mental health problems each year (18.5 percent). In the United States, in 2015, an estimated [9.8 million adults](#) (over 18) had a serious mental disorder. That equates to 4.8 percent of all American adults.

A large proportion of the people who have a mental disorder have more than one.

In the U.S. and much of the developed world, mental

disorders are **one of the leading causes** of disability.

# Common disorders

The most common types of mental illness are **anxiety** disorders, mood disorders, and **schizophrenia** disorders; below we explain each in turn:

## Anxiety disorders



Anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental illness.

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The individual has a severe fear or anxiety, which is linked to certain objects or situations. Most people with an anxiety disorder will try to avoid exposure to whatever triggers their anxiety.

Examples of anxiety disorders include:

Panic disorder - the person experiences sudden paralyzing terror or a sense of imminent disaster.

Phobias - these may include simple **phobias** (a disproportionate fear of objects), social phobias (fear of being subject to the judgment of others), and **agoraphobia** (dread of situations where getting away or breaking free may be difficult). We really do not know how many phobias there are - there could be thousands of types.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) - the person has obsessions and compulsions. In other words, constant stressful thoughts (obsessions), and a powerful urge to perform repetitive acts, such as hand washing (compulsion).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) - this can occur after somebody has been through a traumatic event - something horrible or frightening that they experienced or witnessed. During this type of event, the person thinks that their life or other people's lives are in danger. They may feel afraid or feel that they have no control over what is happening.

## Mood disorders

These are also known as affective disorders or depressive disorders. Patients with these conditions have significant changes in mood, generally involving either mania (elation) or **depression**. Examples of mood disorders include:

Major depression - the individual is no longer interested in and does not enjoy activities and events that they previously liked. There are extreme or prolonged periods of sadness.



Bipolar disorder - previously known as manic-depressive illness, or manic depression. The individual switches from episodes of euphoria (mania) to depression (despair).

Persistent depressive disorder - previously known as dysthymia, this is mild chronic (long term) depression. The patient has similar symptoms to major depression but to a lesser extent.

SAD (seasonal affective disorder) - a type of major depression that is triggered by lack of daylight. It is most common in countries far from the equator during late autumn, winter, and early spring.



What to know about seasonal affective disorder

Seasonal affective disorder is a type of depression that occurs in the winter in countries that are far from the equator.

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## Schizophrenia disorders

Whether or not schizophrenia is a single disorder or a group of related illnesses has yet to be fully determined. It is a highly complex condition. Schizophrenia normally begins between the ages of 15 and 25. The individual

has thoughts that appear fragmented; they also find it hard to process information.

Schizophrenia has negative and positive symptoms. Positive symptoms include delusions, thought disorders, and hallucinations. Negative symptoms include withdrawal, lack of motivation, and a flat or inappropriate mood. (See the article "[What is schizophrenia](#)" for further detail).

## Early signs

It is not possible to reliably tell whether someone is developing a mental health problem; however, if certain signs appear in a short space of time, it may offer clues:



Using drugs more than normal can be an early sign of a mental health issue.

Withdrawing from people or activities they would normally enjoy.

Sleeping or eating too much or too little.

Feeling as if nothing matters.

Consistently low energy.

Using drugs more than normal (including alcohol and nicotine).

Displaying uncharacteristic emotions.

Confusion.

Not being able to complete standard tasks, such as getting to work or cooking a meal.

Persistent thoughts or memories that reappear regularly.

Thinking of harming one's self or others.

Hearing voices.

Delusions.

## Treatment

There are various ways people with mental health problems might receive treatment. It is important to know that what works for one person may not work for another; this is especially the case with mental health. Some strategies or treatments are more successful when combined with others. A patient with a chronic mental disorder may choose different options at different stages in their life. The majority of experts say that a well-informed patient is probably the best judge of what treatment suits them best.



Treatments can include:

Psychotherapy (talking therapies) - this is a psychological approach to treating mental illness.

[Cognitive behavioral therapy](#) (CBT), exposure therapy, and dialectical behavior therapy are examples.

Medication - although it can not cure mental disorders, some medications can improve symptoms.

Self-help - including lifestyle changes such as reducing alcohol intake, sleeping more, and eating well.

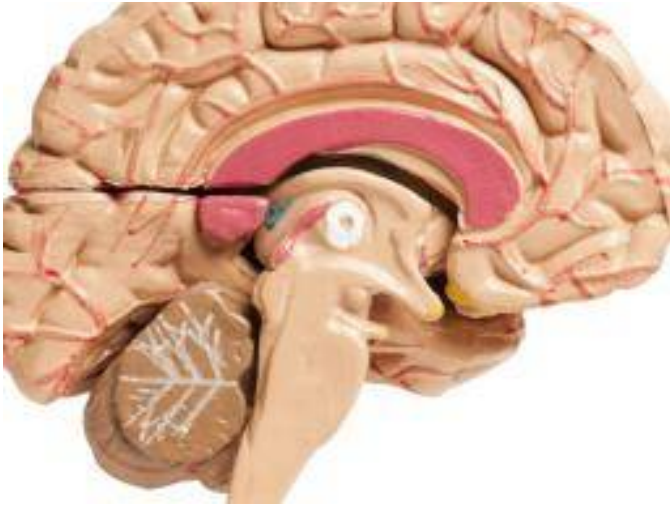
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## Mental Health