

What is a Mental Health Condition?

Mental Health Conditions

Mental health conditions are medical conditions that affect a person's thinking, eating, mood, ability to relate to others and everyday life.

Anyone can get a mental health condition at any time. It can start as the result of a traumatic event or from a lot of stress.

Some people who have a mental health condition may feel ashamed or embarrassed. As a result, they may not seek help. Having a mental health condition is like having a physical disease that can be treated.

Mental health conditions can be treated with medicine, talk therapy, self-care or all three.

Types of Mental Health Conditions

There are several types of mental health conditions, including the following.

- **depression:** Clinical depression is a serious medical condition. It is not something you have made up in your head. It is more than just feeling "down" or "blue" for a few days, and can include feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness and even thoughts of suicide.

Depression symptoms, how severe they are, and how long they last, will vary among people. Symptoms can include:

- feeling sad, anxious or "empty"
- feeling hopeless, negative or both

- feeling guilty, worthless, helpless or all three
- feeling irritable or restless
- losing interest in activities or hobbies you once enjoyed (including sex)
- feeling tired, unmotivated or having less energy than normal
- trouble concentrating, remembering details or making decisions
- trouble falling asleep, waking up early or sleeping too much
- change in appetite and weight
- thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- aches and pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not go away with treatment.

- **bipolar disorder:** Bipolar disorder is condition that causes extreme mood swings that can change from depression to elation or mania. How severe and intense the mood swings are will vary. Some people alternate quickly while others will be in a manic or depression phase for long periods of time (even up to 1 year).

Symptoms of the manic phase include:

- mood that seems really good, high or euphoric ("high as a kite")
- extreme optimism
- grandiose beliefs (delusions)

(over)

- risky behavior or feelings that nothing bad will happen (invincibility)
- hyperactivity, rapid speech and making lots of unrealistic plans
- ideas and thoughts racing through the mind
- less need for sleep
- suddenly being irritable, distracted or having rage or paranoia (thinking people are against you).

■ **schizophrenia:** Schizophrenia makes it hard to tell the difference between what is real and what is unreal. You have trouble thinking clearly, managing emotions and relating with others. You may hear voices or have thoughts that other people are trying to read your mind, control your thoughts or cause you harm.

These obstacles can get in the way of your ability to take care of yourself. Medicines or other treatments can help control and reduce the symptoms, but this disease needs lifelong treatment.

■ **anxiety:** Anxiety is a strong feeling of anxiety and fear. You may feel like you have no control over what is happening. You may constantly worry about all sorts of things and expect the worst.

If you experience panic disorder, you suddenly feel terrified with no warning (panic attacks). This can happen at any time in any place.

A **phobia** is an intense fear of an object, activity or situation. Common fears include animals or insects, heights, enclosed spaces and flying.

If you have a **social phobia**, you may be worried about embarrassing yourself in front of others. You may believe that other people are watching you, waiting for you to make a mistake. You are likely to dread most social situations and withdraw from others.

■ **obsessive-compulsive disorder:** Obsessive-compulsive disorder causes you to worry and have repeated thoughts (obsessions) that may be upsetting. Compulsive behaviors are actions that are repeated and designed to protect you from a feared consequence. For example, you might wash your hands repeatedly for fear of getting germs.

■ **psychosis:** Psychosis is being out of touch with reality. Symptoms include:

- seeing, hearing, feeling or smelling things that do not exist (hallucinations)
- irrational beliefs (delusions).

■ **post-traumatic stress disorder:** Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur after being in or seeing a scary or terrible event, such as a car crash, a fire, war, or an event where you were or thought you might be harmed or killed (or where someone else was harmed or killed in front of you).

■ **eating disorders:** The two most common types of eating disorders are self-starvation (anorexia nervosa), binge eating and vomiting (bulimia), or both.

Treatment

Treatment for mental health conditions can include medicines, talk therapy, self-care or all three. Talk therapy and medicine are often prescribed together for best results.

Talk with your mental health care provider about the best treatment for you.