

What is Mental Illness?

A mental illness is a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling or mood. Such conditions may affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day. Each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis.

Recovery, including meaningful roles in social life, school and work, is possible, especially when you start treatment early and play a strong role in your own recovery process.

A mental health condition isn't the result of one event. Research suggests multiple, linking causes. Genetics, environment and lifestyle influence whether someone develops a mental health condition. A stressful job or home life makes some people more susceptible, as do traumatic life events like being the victim of a crime. Biochemical processes and circuits and basic brain structure may play a role, too.

Living With A Mental Health Condition

If you have a mental health condition, you're not alone. [One in 5](#) American adults experiences some form of mental illness in any given year. And across the population, [1 in every 25](#) adults is living with a serious mental health condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or long-term recurring major depression.

As with other serious illnesses, mental illness is not your fault or that of the people around you, but widespread misunderstandings about mental illness remain. Many people don't seek treatment or remain unaware that their symptoms could be connected to a mental health condition. People may expect a person with serious mental illness to look visibly different from others, and they may tell someone who doesn't "look ill" to "get over it" through willpower. These misperceptions add to the challenges of living with a mental health condition.

Every year people overcome the challenges of mental illness to do the things they enjoy. Through developing and following a treatment plan, you can dramatically reduce many of your symptoms. People with mental health conditions can and do pursue higher education, succeed in their careers, make friends and have relationships. Mental illness can slow us down, but we don't need to let it stop us.

Know The Warning Signs

Trying to tell the difference between what expected behaviors are and what might be the signs of a mental illness isn't always easy. There's no easy test that can let someone know if there is mental illness or if actions and thoughts might be typical behaviors of a person or the result of a physical illness.

Each illness has its own symptoms, but common signs of mental illness in adults and adolescents can include the following:

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low

- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable “highs” or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one’s own feelings, behavior or personality (“lack of insight” or anosognosia)
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing “aches and pains”)
- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

Mental health conditions can also begin to develop in young children. Because they're still learning how to identify and talk about thoughts and emotions, their most obvious symptoms are behavioral. Symptoms in children may include the following:

- Changes in school performance
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for instance fighting to avoid bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

Receiving A Diagnosis

Getting a diagnosis is just the first step; knowing your own preferences and goals is also important. Treatments for mental illness vary by diagnosis and by person. There’s no “one size fits all” treatment. Treatment options can include medication, counseling (therapy), social support and education..

Unlike diabetes or cancer, there is no medical test that can accurately diagnose mental illness. A mental health professional will use the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, to assess symptoms and make a diagnosis. The manual lists criteria including feelings and behaviors and time limits in order to be officially classified as a mental health condition.

After diagnosis, a health care provider can help develop a treatment plan that could include medication, therapy or other lifestyle changes.

Mental Health Treatment & Services

Innovations in the range of evidence based medications, therapy and psychosocial services such as psychiatric rehabilitation, housing, employment and peer supports have made wellness and recovery a reality for people living with mental health conditions.

Choosing the right mix of treatments and supports that work for you is an important step in the recovery process. Treatment choices for mental health conditions will vary from person to person. Even people with the same diagnosis will have different experiences, needs, goals and objectives for treatment. There is no “one size fits all” treatment.

When people are directly involved in designing their own treatment plan, including defining recovery and wellness goals, choosing services that support them and evaluating treatment decisions and progress, the experience of care and outcomes are improved.

There are many tools that can improve the experience on the road to wellness: medication, counseling (therapy), social support and education. Therapy, for example, can take many forms, from learning relaxation skills to intensively reworking your thinking patterns. Social support, acceptance and encouragement from friends, family and others can also make a difference. Education about how to manage a mental health condition along with other medical conditions can provide the skills and supports to enrich the unique journey toward overall recovery and wellness.

Together with a treatment team you can develop a well-rounded and integrated recovery plan that may include counseling, medications, support groups, education programs and other strategies that work for you.

Find a Health Care Provider or Treatment

For general information on mental health and to locate treatment services in your area, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Referral Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). SAMHSA also has a [Behavioral Health Treatment Locator](#) on its website that can be searched by location.

National agencies and advocacy and professional organizations have information on finding a mental health professional and sometimes practitioner locators on their websites. Examples include but are not limited to:

- [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](http://www.aada.org) - <http://www.aada.org>
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](http://www.dbsalliance.org/) - <http://www.dbsalliance.org/>
- [Mental Health America](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/) - <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](http://www.nami.org/) - <http://www.nami.org/>

University or medical school-affiliated programs may offer treatment options. Search on the website of local university health centers for their psychiatry or psychology departments.

You can also go to the website of your state or county government and search for the health services department.

Some federal agencies offer resources for identifying practitioners and assistance in finding low cost health services. These include:

- **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA):** HRSA works to improve access to health care. The website has information on finding affordable healthcare, including health centers that offer care on a sliding fee scale. <http://hrsa.gov>
- **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS):** CMS has information on the website about benefits and eligibility for these programs and how to enroll. <http://cms.gov>
- The National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus website also has lists of *directories* and *organizations* that can help in identifying a health practitioner.
- Practitioner lists in health care plans can provide mental health professionals that participate with your plan.
- **Mental Health and Addiction Insurance Help:** This website from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers resources to help answer questions about insurance coverage for mental health care. <https://www.hhs.gov/mental-health-and-addiction-insurance-help>
- Contact the **NAMI HelpLine** to find out what services and supports are available in your community. <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-HelpLine>

If you are in crisis, and need immediate support or intervention, immediately call, or go the website of the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.npsp.org/) (1-800-273-8255). **Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** Your confidential and toll-free call goes to the nearest crisis center in the Lifeline national network. These centers provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals. If the situation is potentially life-threatening, call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room.

Mental Health Facts IN AMERICA

Fact: 43.8 million adults experience mental illness in a given year.



1 in 5 adults in America experience a mental illness.

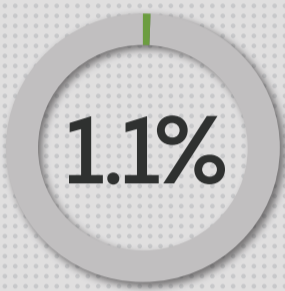


Nearly 1 in 25 (10 million) adults in America live with a serious mental illness.

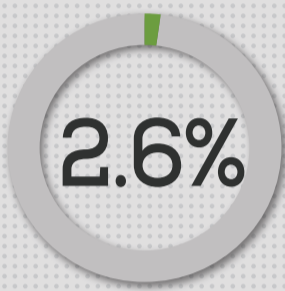


One-half of all chronic mental illness begins by the age of 14; three-quarters by the age of 24.

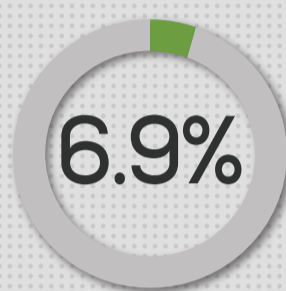
Prevalence of Mental Illness by Diagnosis



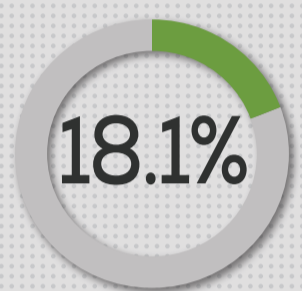
1 in 100 (2.4 million) American adults live with schizophrenia.¹



2.6% (6.1 million) of American adults live with bipolar disorder.¹



6.9% (16 million) of American adults live with major depression.¹



18.1% (42 million) of American adults live with anxiety disorders.¹

Consequences



10.2m

Approximately 10.2 million adults have **co-occurring** mental health and addiction disorders.¹



26%

Approximately 26% of **homeless** adults staying in shelters live with serious mental illness.¹



24%

Approximately 24% of **state prisoners** have "a recent history of a mental health condition".²

Impact



1st

Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and is a major contributor to the global burden of disease.¹



-\$193b

Serious mental illness costs America \$193.2 billion in lost earning every year.³



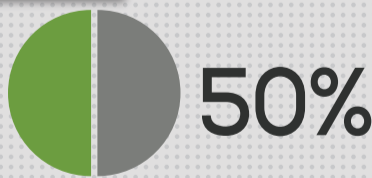
90%

90% of those who die by suicide have an underlying mental illness. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.³

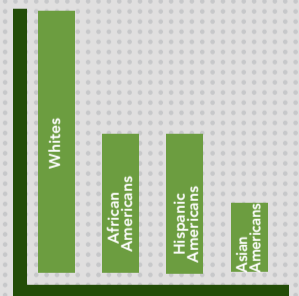
Treatment in America



Nearly 60% of adults with a mental illness didn't receive mental health services in the previous year.⁴



Nearly 50% of youth aged 8-15 didn't receive mental health services in the previous year.¹



African American & Hispanic Americans used mental health services at about 1/2 the rate of whites in the past year and Asian Americans at about 1/3 the rate.¹

Ways to Get Help



Talk with your doctor



Connect with other individuals and families



Learn more about mental illness



Visit NAMI.org

¹ This document cites statistics provided by the National Institute of Mental Health. www.nimh.nih.gov
² Statistics provided by Department of Justice.
³ American Journal of Psychiatry and U.S. Surgeon General's Report, 1999.
⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

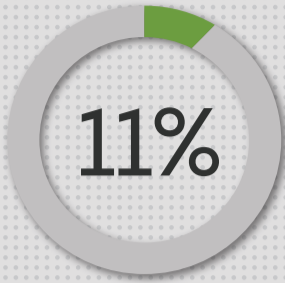
Mental Health Facts

CHILDREN & TEENS

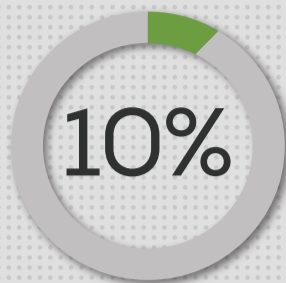
Fact: 1 in 5 children ages 13-18 have, or will have a serious mental illness.¹



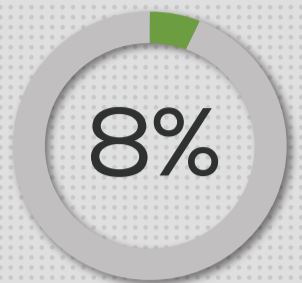
20% of youth ages 13-18 live with a mental health condition¹



11% of youth have a mood disorder¹



10% of youth have a behavior or conduct disorder¹



8% of youth have an anxiety disorder¹

Impact



50%

50% of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24.¹



10 yrs

The average delay between onset of symptoms and intervention is 8-10 years.¹

37%



37% of students with a mental health condition age 14 and older drop out of school—the highest dropout rate of any disability group.¹

70%



70% of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have a mental illness.¹

Suicide

3rd



Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death in youth ages 10 - 24.¹



90%

90% of those who died by suicide had an underlying mental illness.¹

Warning Signs

- Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks (e.g., crying regularly, feeling fatigued, feeling unmotivated).
- Trying to harm or kill oneself or making plans to do so.
- Out-of-control, risk-taking behaviors that can cause harm to self or others.
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart, physical discomfort or fast breathing.
- Not eating, throwing up or using laxatives to lose weight; significant weight loss or gain.
- Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships.
- Repeated use of drugs or alcohol.
- Drastic changes in behavior, personality or sleeping habits (e.g., waking up early and acting agitated).
- Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still that can lead to failure in school.
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities like hanging out with friends or going to classes.

4 Things Parents Can Do



Talk with your pediatrician



Get a referral to a mental health specialist



Work with the school



Connect with other families

¹ This document cites statistics provided by the National Institute of Mental Health. www.nimh.nih.gov

Follow Us!

facebook.com/officialNAMI

twitter.com/NAMIcommunicate