

Mental Health



Embracing Health

Mental health is defined as the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. From your early childhood until your golden years, mental health is your catalyst for thinking and communications skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience and self-esteem. Your mental health can be adversely affected by the loss of a loved one, monetary concerns, hormonal fluctuations, world events, even your genetic makeup. Protecting your mental health is every bit as important as taking care of your physical well being. It's important not only to recognize the signs and symptoms of some of the more common mental disorders, but to know how to seek help.

Start a Dialogue

My 411! Ask yourself, when was the last time I got up in the morning and felt excited about the day ahead of me?

Talk 2 Me! Talk to your doctor. How can you tell when someone is clinically depressed?

Embracing Women

Women experience depression nearly twice as often as men. We often experience it at an earlier age, deal with it longer, and are more severely affected than our male counterparts. Women are more likely than men to experience depression associated with conditions that include eating disorders, anxiety, and stress. Men, on the other hand, tend to have depression associated with alcoholism, antisocial and/or self-centered

behaviors or obsessive-compulsive personalities. Married women are more likely to suffer from depression than married men. Mothers are particularly susceptible. Women who have been victims of rape or domestic violence are at an increased risk of major depression. Older women who are depressed may even be at greater risk for falls that result in bone fractures.

Consider Gender Differences

My 411! Ask yourself, do my blue moods seem to hang around more than they used to?

Talk 2 Me! Talk to your doctor. I'm having trouble sleeping. Someone told me that sleep apnea can cause depression and sleep disorders. How can I be tested?

Embracing Lifestyles

Regular exercise has been shown to help some people deal with depression as both a preventative and a treatment (for mild depression). Physical activity alters your brain chemistry and can lead to feelings of well being. Depressed people are likely to get about half as much exercise as people who aren't depressed. The irony is that apparently a sedentary lifestyle increases the risk of depression, and depression increases the likelihood of a sedentary lifestyle. It is believed that regular exercise, and the increase in physical fitness that results, alters serotonin levels in the brain and leads to improved mood and feelings of well being.

Get a Handle

My 411! Ask yourself, when I'm starting to feel a bit blue, or out of sorts, am I willing to try taking a walk or some other form of physical activity to see if it helps improve my mood?

Talk to Me! Talk to your doctor. I want to be more physically active, but it's been years since I've really exercised. What's a safe way to start getting back in shape?

Embracing Common Sense!

In order to determine if you are mentally healthy, you need to know some of the warning signs that indicate mental illness. A few of these include: prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells, significant changes in appetite or sleep patterns, irritability, anger, worry, agitation, anxiety, pessimism or indifference, lack of energy or persistent tiredness, trouble concentrating or indecisiveness, an inability to take pleasure in former interests, unexplained aches and pains, or recurring thoughts of death or suicide.

Create Healthier Habits

My 411! Ask yourself, I've been snapping at everyone lately. Is there something serious bothering me?

Talk to Me! Talk to your doctor. Feeling out of control when it comes to my mental health is scary for me. I don't want people to think I'm crazy. How is depression treated, and will people be able to tell I'm getting treatment?



Mental Health

Embracing Science

People who have a variation of a gene involved in regulating serotonin levels may be more prone to depression. Bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression) is another mental illness that may have chemical connections. Individuals with bipolar disorder often alternate between high highs and low lows that come and go fairly rapidly. Women experience this rapid cycling more often than men. Women suffering from bipolar disorder are more likely to be misdiagnosed than men.

It's Time for Show and Tell

My 411! Ask yourself, is what I'm feeling simply momentary boundless enthusiasm, or am I really having trouble keeping my emotions in balance?

Talk to Me! Talk to your doctor. I keep noticing that my thoughts seem to be bouncing around quite a bit more than I'm used to. Is it possible to be manic sometimes and still be mentally healthy?

Possible tests

No specific blood tests or X-rays can determine that a person definitely has bipolar disorder. A diagnosis is made on the basis of observing several signs and symptoms. A few of these include: increased activity and gestures (pacing, tapping feet), inflated self-esteem, poor judgment, racing thoughts, a decreased need for sleep, inability to control your temper, irritability, pressured speech (your mouth can't keep up with your thoughts), you find yourself unable to respond to social cues to stop talking. Other symptoms may include increased activities with a high risk of unpleasant consequences such as

sexual affairs, gambling, or risky investments. Some people even experience psychotic episodes that can include delusions and hallucinations.

Make Smart Choices

My 411! Ask yourself, am I going to allow my embarrassment about seeking help keep me trapped in this emotional turmoil?

Talk 2 Me! Talk to your doctor. Is most treatment for depression and bipolar disorder done on an outpatient basis? What treatment is covered by insurance?

Possible treatments

Treatment of bipolar disorder generally involves medications to stabilize mood swings and counseling to further assist with finding ways to recognize and control symptoms. Depression is also usually treated with a combination of medication and counseling. Although many patients resist the counseling portion of their treatment, it plays a vital role in helping individuals come to terms with their illness, and for some depressed people can actually help to wean them off of antidepressants.

My 411! Ask yourself, is there someone I would feel comfortable talking to about my emotional problems?

Talk 2 Me! Talk to your doctor. What medications are available to help manage bipolar disorder?

Embracing Strength

Treatments for mental illness and emotional problems no longer hold the taboo they once did. As people have become better educated about these issues, increased awareness and understanding have developed. This is not to say that mental illness does not take a heavy toll on families, but many of the stigmas and misconceptions that once shrouded this subject in secrecy and shame are diminishing. The real shame today would be not seeking treatment for a problem that might be readily controlled.

Simple Steps

My 411! Ask yourself, I have a friend who seems to be really depressed. What can I do to help?

Talk 2 Me! Talk to your doctor. Does depression and bipolar disorder run in families?