

What is mental illness?

Mental illness can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, income, social status, religion, or race/ethnicity.

Definition

Mental illness refers to a wide range of disorders that affect mood, thinking, and behavior. People with mental illness often experience distress and problems functioning at work, home, and in social situations. The major types of mental illness include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bipolar mood disorder
- Personality disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Trauma disorders
- Eating disorders
- Addictive behaviors

Statistics

Depression and anxiety are the most common mental illnesses in the United States. In 2015, nearly 18% of American adults experienced a mental health issue. One in 25 lived with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or

major depression. People with serious mental illnesses may lose touch with reality and require high levels of care, including hospitalization.

Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences such as trauma or abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

Signs and symptoms

Experiencing one or more of the following symptoms, especially for a period of two weeks or more, may be a sign of a problem:

- Changes in sleep: sleeping too much or too little, or early awakening
- Changes in appetite; changes in weight
- Withdrawing from people and activities
- Low energy and fatigue

- Feeling numb or frequently sad and hopeless
- Having trouble performing everyday tasks such as getting to work or school
- Feeling unusually confused, angry, upset, agitated, worried or scared
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems with others
- Having persistent thoughts or compulsions
- Hearing voices
- Having thoughts of harming yourself or others

Resources: help is available

Fewer than half of adults with diagnosable mental health problems receive treatment. Yet chronic mental health problems are associated with medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and cancer. People with untreated serious mental illness may die 25 years earlier than people without mental illness.

1. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-mental-illness-ami-among-us-adults.shtml>



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Mental illness is treatable, and friends and family members can be important influences to help someone get the treatment and services they need. Primary care physicians can refer individuals to psychiatrists and other professionals who specialize in mental health treatment.

People in crisis who need immediate support or intervention can contact the free, confidential National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If the situation is life-threatening, call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room.

For more information on mental health treatment resources, contact:

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

www.nami.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

Employee Assistance Program
For Professional Consultation

Call 800-424-4485

TTY Users: 800-456-4006