

## When To Seek Help For Mental Health Disorders

Most people believe that mental health disorders are rare and “happen to someone else.” In fact, mental health disorders are common and widespread. An estimated 54 million Americans suffer from some form of mental disorder in a given year.

### What is Mental Illness

A mental illness is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life’s ordinary demands and routines. Mental health problems may be related to excessive stress due to a particular situation or series of events. As with cancer, diabetes and heart disease, mental illnesses are often physical as well as emotional and psychological. Mental illnesses may be caused by a reaction to environmental stresses, genetic factors, biochemical imbalances, or a combination of these. With proper care and treatment, many individuals learn to cope or recover from a mental illness or emotional disorder. Learning about developing symptoms or early warning signs -- and taking action -- can help. Early intervention can help reduce the severity of a mental health disorder. It may even be possible to delay or prevent onset of a major mental illness altogether.

### Signs and Symptoms

**Withdrawal** — Recent social withdrawal and loss of interest in others (isolating self, spending excessive amounts of time alone, refusing to participate in social activities).

**Decrease in typical functioning** — An unusual decrease/change in functioning, at school, work or social activities, such as quitting recreation activities; refusing to go to school or work, or an increase in behavioral problems when there; or difficulty performing familiar tasks.

**Problems thinking** — Problems with concentration, memory or logical thought and speech that are difficult to explain.

**Increased sensitivity** — Heightened sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells or touch; avoidance of over-stimulating situations.

**Apathy** — Loss of initiative or desire to participate in normal daily activities, lack of enjoyment in activities that used to be pleasurable/fun.

**Lack of energy** — Overwhelming feeling of lethargy, which may lead to sleeping all of the time or a decrease in sleep.

**Having a hopeless or helpless outlook on life** — Negative views about yourself. Feeling worthless or unloveable and/or experiencing inappropriate guilt (“it’s all my fault”).

**Worries** — Persistent or excessive worries or fears that are unprovoked and interfere with daily life/activities.

**Unusual behavior** — Odd, uncharacteristic, peculiar behavior.

**Sleep or appetite and weight changes** — Dramatic sleep and appetite changes (which may lead to unintentional weight loss or gain) or decline in personal care.

**Mood changes** — Rapid or dramatic shifts in feelings. Moods fluctuate uncontrollably, experiencing anger outbursts one minute and crying spells the next.

**Thoughts of death or dying** — Thoughts of harming yourself (or others) or of committing suicide. *Please note, people with suicidal thoughts or intent, or thoughts of harming others, need immediate attention.*

If you or a loved one are experiencing two or more of these symptoms, and they are negatively impacting overall quality of life, it may be time to seek professional help. It is important to remember that there is hope for recovery. With treatment, many people with mental illness return to a productive and fulfilling life.