

Surveys show a major increase in the number of U.S. adults who report symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression during the pandemic, compared with surveys before the pandemic. Mental illness is more common than one would think; it's the most common health condition in the United States with 1 in 5 Americans experiencing a mental illness each year.

So, what are the causes and types of mental illnesses? What are some tips you can take right now to help improve your mental health? Lastly, at what point should you or a loved one seek professional help, and how do you do so? We'll address all these important questions below.

CAUSES OF MENTAL ILLNESS

- Early adverse life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse (for example, child abuse, sexual assault, witnessing violence, etc.)
- Experiences related to other ongoing (chronic) medical conditions, such as cancer or diabetes.
- Biological factors, such as genes or chemical imbalances in the brain
- Use of alcohol or recreational drugs
- Having few friends
- Having feelings of loneliness or isolation

TYPES OF MENTAL ILLNESS

- Depression and other Mood Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Personality Disorders
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Schizophrenia Spectrum and Other Psychotic Disorders
- Substance Use Disorders

TIPS FOR SELF-CARE

- Get regular exercise.
- Just 30 minutes of walking every day can help boost your mood and improve your health. Small amounts of exercise add up, so don't be discouraged if you can't do 30 minutes at one time.
- Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated.
- A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve your energy and focus throughout the day. Also, limit caffeinated beverages such as soft drinks or coffee.
- Make sleep a priority
- Stick to a schedule, and make sure you're getting enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue light exposure from your phone or computer before bedtime.

- Try a relaxing activity.
- Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities you enjoy such as journaling.
- Set goals and priorities.
- Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much. Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- Practice gratitude.
- Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for. Be specific. Write them down at night, or replay them in your mind.
- Focus on positivity
- Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.
- Stay connected.
- Reach out to your friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP



Seek professional help if you are experiencing severe or distressing symptoms that have lasted two weeks or more, such as:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable
- Inability to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities

Don't wait until your symptoms are overwhelming. Talk about your concerns with your primary care provider, who can refer you to a mental health specialist if needed.

If you need help finding an in-network provider, the Healthcare Highways Care Coordination team will walk you through the process and answer any questions you have along the way.

If you are thinking about harming yourself or attempting suicide, tell someone who can help right away or dial 911 in an emergency. You also can call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline)** at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, or text the Crisis Text Line (**text HELLO to 741741**). Both services are free and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are confidential.