

# Understanding mental health and mental illness

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Mental health is the overall wellness of how you think, regulate your feelings and behave. A mental disorder may be present when patterns or changes in thinking, feeling or behavior cause distress or disrupt a

person's ability to function.

Cultural norms and [social expectations](#) also play a role in defining mental health. There is no standard measure across cultures to determine whether a behavior is normal or when it becomes disruptive. What might be normal in one society may be a cause for concern in another.

Mental illness refers to a wide range of mental health conditions—disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Many people have [mental health concerns](#) from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function. About one in five adults has a mental illness in any given year, and mental illness can begin at any age.

Examples of mental illness include:

- Depression.
- Anxiety disorders.
- Schizophrenia.
- Eating disorders.
- Addictive behaviors.

Access to [mental health treatment](#) is an important part of overall health care services. It's also important to understand the roles of different types of mental health specialists to find the one that fits your needs. The best choice for your care will depend on your concern or condition; whether you need medications, counseling or both; and your health insurance coverage. Finding the right match is crucial to establishing a good relationship and getting the most out of your treatment.

Treatment depends on the type of mental illness, its severity and what works best for you. In many cases, a combination of treatments may be

recommended. If you have a mild mental illness with well-controlled symptoms, treatment from your primary health care professional may be sufficient. However, often a [team approach](#) is appropriate to make sure all your psychiatric, medical and social needs are met.

Unfortunately, negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental health condition are common. Others' judgments almost always stem from a lack of understanding rather than information based on facts. Learn more about the stigma of [mental illness](#) and what you can do to cope.

Connect with others talking about mental health in the Mental Health Support Group on Mayo Clinic Connect, an online patient community moderated by Mayo Clinic.

If you think your teen or someone you know may hurt themselves or attempt suicide, get help right away by taking one of these actions:

- Call your [mental health](#) specialist.
- Call a crisis hotline number. In the U.S., call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 24/7. Or use Lifeline Chat. Services are free and confidential. U.S. veterans or service members who are in crisis can call 988 and press "1" for the Veterans Crisis Line, text 838255 or chat online. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S. also has a Spanish-language phone line at 888-628-9454.
- Call 911 or your local emergency number.
- Seek help from your health care professional.
- Reach out to a close friend or loved one.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader or someone else in your faith community.

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