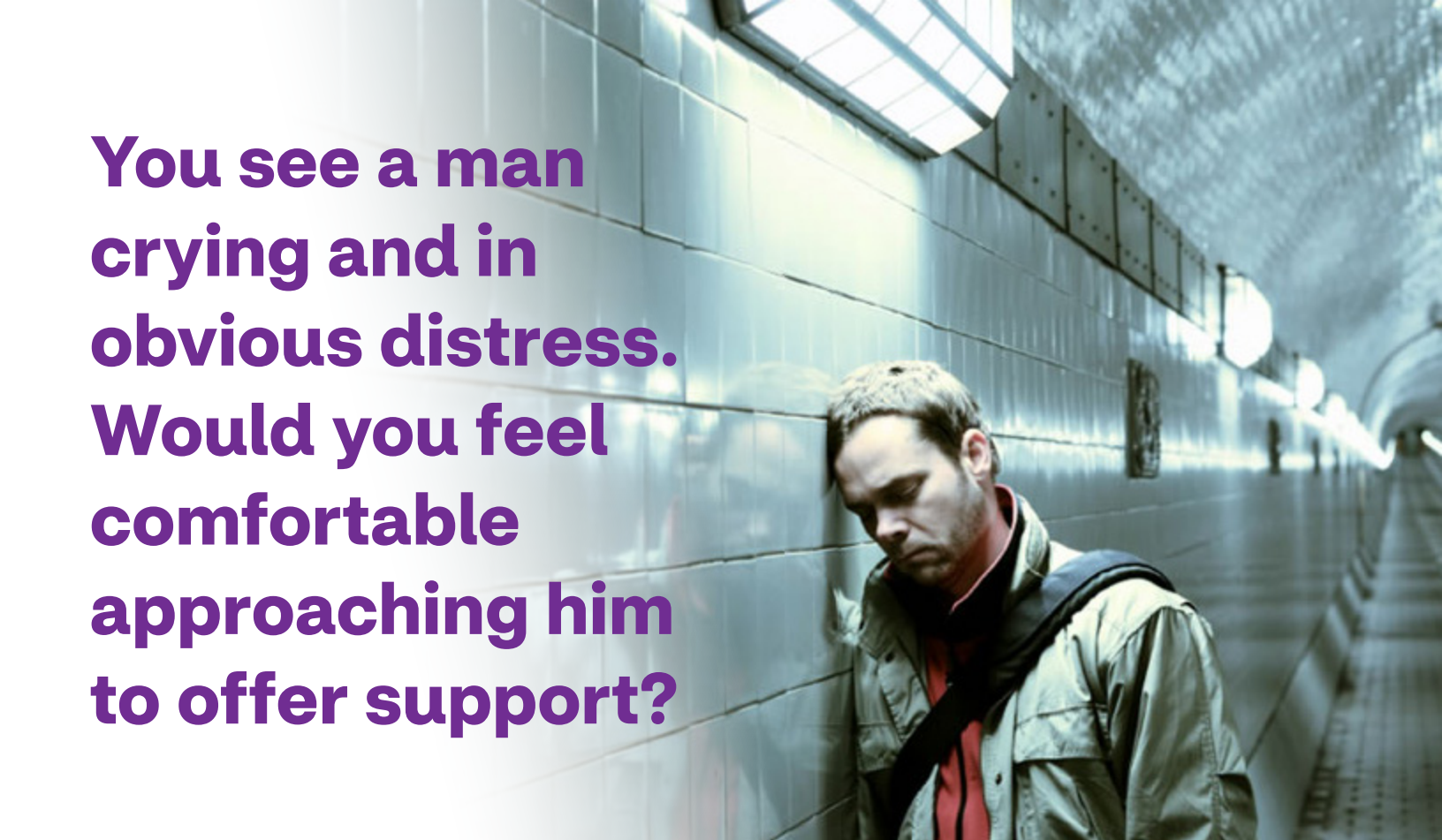




## Mental health awareness guide

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A photograph of a man in a subway station. He is wearing a light-colored jacket over a red shirt and has a black bag strap over his shoulder. He is looking down with a sad expression, leaning against a tiled wall. The station has a tiled ceiling and fluorescent lights.

**You see a man  
crying and in  
obvious distress.  
Would you feel  
comfortable  
approaching him  
to offer support?**

When someone appears to be injured, or in physical distress, offering to help is second nature. People are more likely to pause to consider their own comfort level before offering to help someone experiencing mental or emotional distress.

More than 50% of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States. Less than half of those experiencing a mental health condition receive treatment.<sup>2</sup>

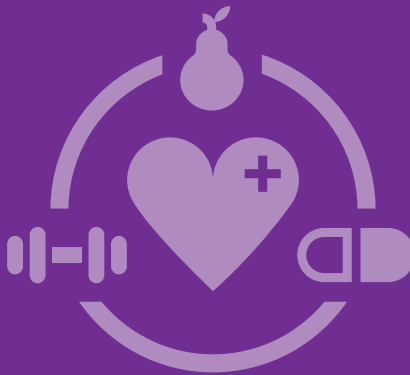
<sup>1</sup> [Mental Illness](#). National Institute of Mental Health. Accessed March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> [Statistics](#). National Institute of Mental Health. Accessed March 2023.

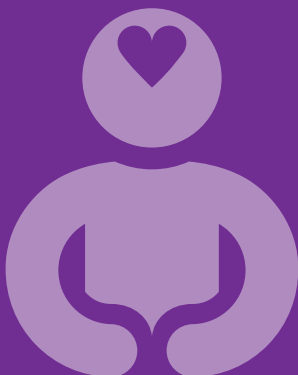




Like any other health condition, the earlier individuals seek proper diagnosis, treatment, and support, the better the outcome. Treatment options look different for everyone. Find what works for you or your loved one.



Take simple steps to be proactive about your overall health. That includes your mental well-being. Keep reading to learn the facts and find helpful resources.



Take charge of your health. Together we can change the conversation to raise awareness that mental health is health.

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# Changing the Narrative



## The truth about mental health

Everyone has mental health. Everyone has physical health. Together they make up our overall health. Similarly, just like there are many factors that can lead to physical illness, the same is true about mental illness. Making sure we understand some of the factors that can cause mental illness are an important part of the conversation.

Mental health issues are common, and with education and understanding we can be better at advocating for ourselves and others.

Lack of understanding and other barriers, can prevent people from getting the care they deserve and leave individuals feeling lonely and isolated.

- **Feelings of shame and embarrassment.** Quite often there is an unnecessary stigma associated with mental health conditions; one that is not associated with physical health conditions such as heart disease or chronic illness. Individuals with mental illness may worry about being judged, or may have their own internal shame or embarrassment about what they are experiencing. Physical and mental wellness are equally important to whole person health.
- **Lack of awareness or acknowledgement.** Some individuals are not fully aware of the symptoms they are experiencing. Others may be told the symptoms they are experiencing are “all in their head”.
- **Stigma around mental health and see seeking help.** Public views and perceptions about mental health can have significant effects on the individual who is struggling.

Individuals may delay seeking professional help or family support for fear they will be seen as weak. Societal views tend to imply that those who cannot cope or manage on their own are less capable. Stigma can lead to isolation, worsening symptoms, low self-esteem and self-worth and delay the opportunity for early identification and recovery.

## People can get better

With the right help and support, people can and do get better!

Every person is unique. And there are treatment options available. It's important to talk with a professional to determine the option that works best for their needs. Treatment can include medication, talk-therapy and wellness plans. When people feel safe, supported and encouraged they are more likely to seek help.

## What you can do to help

You don't have to be a mental health professional to make a difference. Consider these tips:

- Talk openly about mental health without judgement.
- Show kindness and compassion along with a willingness to listen.
- Learn more about mental health conditions and potential signs and symptoms.
- Speak out against mental health stigma and speak up for mental health awareness.

People with mental illness can feel alone. If you think someone is dealing with a mental health problem, listen to understand rather than to respond. Be present. Encourage the person to seek help from their doctor or a mental health professional. Offer hope. If you want to learn more, check out these resources:

- **Mental Health America.** Learn about living mentally healthy and how to find support and recovery at [mhanational.org](https://www.mhanational.org)
- **Mental Health First Aid.** Sign up for a mental health first aid course at [mentalhealthfirstaid.org](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)

With the right help and support, people can and do get better!





# Depression



Depression is one of the most common mental health problems people face today. Each year major depression affects approximately 21 million Americans. 3.7 million are youth between the ages of 12 and 17. And it's the leading cause of disability worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

It's not uncommon to experience feelings of sadness every so often. But when these feelings last for longer periods of time and begin to interfere with daily life and/or complicate other medical conditions, you may have a major depressive disorder which can only be diagnosed by a mental health professional.

Depression can interfere with the ability to work, study, sleep, eat and enjoy activities you once enjoyed. It may even be hard to get out of bed. The good news is that depression is very treatable, and the earlier individuals identify the symptoms and seek support, the more likely they will have a full recovery.

We now know depression involves biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Knowing your potential risk for depression along with being proactive with self-care activities and stress management can play a role in how quickly one will recover when faced with difficult situations.

<sup>3</sup> [Depression- Basic Facts about Depression](#). Mental Health America (MHA). Accessed March 2023.







## Causes of depression

Depression can have many contributing factors. For some individuals depression may seem to come on for no reason at all. Below are some contribution factors (any one or combination may be present):

- **Biological** — brain chemistry and levels of certain brain chemicals may cause or contribute to depression.
- **Cognitive** — individuals who are more prone to negative thinking patterns and low self-esteem are more at risk of developing major depression.
- **Gender** — women experience depression at higher rates than men. This is likely related to hormones in part as a result of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. There may be other contributing factors as well.
- **Medical conditions** — serious chronic, complex and or terminal medical illnesses can lead to depression. Examples include but are not limited to heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and Multiple Sclerosis.
- **Medication** — side effects of medication can cause depression.
- **Genetic** — family history of mental illness increases the risk of developing depression or other mental illnesses.
- **Environmental** — life events and stressors including relationships, financial, legal, and significant losses can all contribute to major depression.

## Symptoms of depression

Symptoms of depression are different for everyone, including the number of symptoms and the severity. If you are worried you might have depression, you can take [a free depression test online](#) followed by setting up time with your physician to talk further about the best plan of care for you.

Some people experience only a few symptoms while others experience many. Some common symptoms include:

- Persistent sad mood
- Feeling anxious
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies or enjoyable activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling “slowed down”
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Problems sleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Restlessness or irritability
- Persistent physical complaints such as headaches or chronic pain

Very often, a combination of factors is involved in the onset of a depressive disorder.



# Understanding suicide



Suicide is a complex health condition. It is also generally preventable, especially with prevention and early intervention.

Suicide is the twelfth leading cause of death in the United States, claiming nearly 64,000 lives in a given year.<sup>4</sup>

The topic of suicide can be difficult to talk about; however, research shows that talking openly about mental health and suicide not only raises awareness and decreases stigma, it also saves lives. Some questions to consider:

- Who is at risk?
- How do I know if someone is thinking about suicide?
- What should I do if I am worried about someone?

## Risk factors

In order to take prevention measures, it's important to know what factors can increase one's risk. Research has shown that risk factors fit into the following three categories:

### Health

- Mental health conditions
- Serious head injury
- Chronic illness/Chronic pain

### Historical

- History of childhood trauma or abuse
- Prior suicide attempt
- Combat stress
- Loss of someone close by suicide
- Family mental health history

### Environmental

- Access to lethal means (weapons, pills, bridges, cars)
- Significant life stresses (Legal, financial, job, relationship)

Significant life losses (Job, housing, income, independence, loved ones through death)

## Know the signs

Many people who are thinking about ending their life give warning signs. Always take these signs seriously. Have an honest conversation with someone you are worried about. Signs can be any talk, behavior or mood changes that appear out of character or extreme.

Here are some common signs that someone may be thinking about suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Giving away possessions or pets
- Putting affairs in order — like updating a will
- Taking risks
- Saying goodbye like it's the last time

## What can you do

Reaching out when you are worried about someone is hard. Showing you care enough to notice and stop to ask uncomfortable questions. It's also a life saving gift. Know that you don't have to fix the person's feelings or problem solve.

These are things you can do:

- Listen.
- Ask questions. It's important to ask if the person directly if they are thinking about death or suicide.
- Take threats seriously. Avoid making light of threats, dismissing or minimizing what someone is going through. Do not use guilt trips or dare the person to engage in suicide.
- Stay with the individual and encourage mental health support. Offer options such as a hotline, crisis center, or emergency department.
- Remove dangerous items. If you can, try to remove things like knives, razors, guns or drugs from the person's possession. Don't put yourself in danger. If you're not nearby and you know the person has access to lethal means, call 911.
- Don't underestimate the power of being present. Providing continued support after the event can decrease feelings of isolation.
- Be supportive of treatment. Know it's not your job to take the place of a therapist.
- Offer to help find support. Should the individual be receptive, you can research treatment options, make calls or arrange for a ride to the hospital for an assessment.
- Do not threaten or coerce.
- Do not leave the individual alone.
- Don't leave a suicidal person alone.
- Call 911. If someone has actively taken steps to end their life or needs medical attention.

Hospitals are a good resource. They can assess a person's risk of self-harm and get help. If you know someone has a plan and the means for suicide, get him or her to a hospital. Depending on the person's risk or location, you can always call 911.

By asking questions, listening, offering support and connecting people to resources, you can make a difference.

<sup>4</sup> [Suicide](#). National Institute of Mental Health. Accessed March 2023.



# Anxiety



## Facts about anxiety

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the United States. In fact, 40 million U.S. adults are affected by an anxiety disorder.<sup>5</sup>

## What causes anxiety?

It is normal to experience anxiety as part of everyday life, especially when faced with a life problem, decision or change. But anxiety disorders are different. They can get in the way of people living the lives they want.

Feelings of fear are meant to help us. When we feel fear or anxiety, it's our bodies trying to help us cope. It doesn't mean we're weak. Science shows most mental health issues are due to complex factors.

Anxiety disorders may result from biological factors that change the way the brain works. Anxiety can also run in families. And sometimes a trauma or even a welcome event such as a wedding or promotion can trigger anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

## What does anxiety feel like?

Anxiety isn't just a feeling. It often shows itself in the body. It can look like:

- Racing heart
- Shaking hands
- Dry mouth
- Sweaty palms
- Upset stomach

## How do I know if I need help managing my anxiety?

It's normal to have some anxiety. But how do you know if and when you should seek help? It's always okay to ask for help and support and to seek guidance from a professional. Additionally you may ask yourself if your worries:

- Keep you from going about your routine
- Prevent you from reaching your goals
- Leave you feeling overwhelmed

If you notice your anxiety prevents you from living your life, a mental health professional can help you develop skills to better manage your anxiety and stress.

## How can I reduce my anxiety?

There are many treatments and self-help tools to help manage anxiety and fear. Treatment with a professional may include talk therapy, conversation about the pros and cons of medication, and other lifestyle adjustments that may be helpful in creating habits that foster well-being.

Lots of people struggle with anxiety. It's okay to seek help.

You're not alone. Treatment and support are available. Anxiety doesn't have to keep you from living your life.

<sup>5</sup> [Facts & Statistics](#). Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Accessed April 2023.

<sup>6</sup> [Causes of Anxiety and Depression: Symptoms and Signs](#). The Ranch. Accessed April 2023.



# Mental health and well-being resources



Mental illness doesn't just affect the person with the disease. It also affects anyone who cares about or lives or works with that person. Chances are mental illness has touched your life in some way. If you want to learn more about mental health issues and how you can help, consider these resources.

## Mental Health First Aid

Do you want to learn more about mental health problems and how to respond? Similar to CPR and First Aid training, Mental Health First Aid helps people identify, understand and respond to mental health issues. You can find a local training at [mentalhealthfirstaid.org](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org).

## General mental well-being

- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [Mental Health America](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Mental Health](#)
- [Person-First Language](#)
- [MindCheck<sup>2</sup>](#)

## Mental health concerns

- [Anxiety Disorders Association of America](#)
- [Depression Bipolar Support Alliance](#)
- [Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America](#)
- [Postpartum Support International \(PSI\)](#)
- [National Alliance for the Mentally Ill](#)
- [Parenting Well — Resources for Parents with Mental Illness](#)

## Addiction

- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- [Narcotics Anonymous](#)
- [Gamblers Anonymous](#)
- [Al-Anon/Alateen](#)
- [SAMHSA National Mental Health Information Center — Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

## Children's resources

- [Autism Society of America](#)
- [Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder \(CHADD\)](#)
- [Bipolar Children](#)
- [Prevent Child Abuse America](#)

## Crisis and suicide prevention

- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resources Center](#)
- [The Suicide and Crisis Prevention Lifeline - 988](#)
- [Stop a Suicide](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [The Crisis Text Line - 741741](#)
- [The Trans-Lifeline](#)





You don't have to be a  
mental health professional  
to listen and show someone you care.  
You can make a difference.

To learn more call us  
at the number on your ID card or  
visit us at [aetna.com](https://www.aetna.com).



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