



Canadian Mental
Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

MENTAL ILLNESSES



Plainer language series

A mental illness is a real health problem that affects the mind. A mental illness changes the way you think, feel and act. These changes can be upsetting. Mental illness is not your fault. You cannot just get over it on your own.

This booklet discusses eight mental illnesses you may have heard about:

1. Depression
2. Bipolar disorder
3. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
4. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
5. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
6. Schizophrenia
7. Eating disorders
8. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

If you are thinking about ending your life, call 1-800-SUICIDE. It stands for 1-800-784-2433. If you think that a loved one is in danger, call 9-1-1.

There are other mental illnesses, too. If you think you might have a mental illness, it is a good idea to talk to a doctor. You do not have to know exactly what illness you might have. You just need to tell your doctor what you feel and how it affects you.



Depression

Your mood is the way you feel. “Happy” and “sad” are two different moods that people feel. Your mood is affected by things that happen around you. When something good happens, you feel good. When something bad happens, you feel bad. These feelings do not usually last

very long. If you have a mental illness like depression, your mood changes and stays that way for a long time. You cannot control how you feel.

Depression can start at any time in your life. Depression makes it hard to enjoy things. You feel sad, empty or hopeless most of the time. You may blame yourself for problems or think that things will never be good again. You may feel tired all the time. You may have a hard time concentrating. You may have problems with eating and sleeping. You may think you would be better off dead. Depression is not just a bad day.

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder is made up of two kinds of strong moods. Your mood changes from very high to very low. The low mood is like depression. The high mood is called mania. A person can have healthy times between the depression and the mania.

What is mania? Mania may make you feel very happy, irritated, or angry. You have a lot of big ideas and big plans. It may feel like your thoughts are racing. You may speak so quickly that others cannot understand you. You also have a lot of extra energy. You may feel like you do not need much sleep. When people have mania, they may do things they would not normally do.

Generalized anxiety disorder or GAD

Anxiety is what you feel when you are scared. It is a normal reaction when you think that something bad might happen. GAD is different from normal anxiety. It makes you feel anxious even when you are safe. It is hard to stop worrying if you have GAD.



Obsessive-compulsive disorder or OCD

OCD is made up of obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are unwanted thoughts that do not go away. They make you feel upset or anxious. Compulsions are things you do to get rid of the anxiety. Compulsions take a lot of time and can make you change your daily routine.



Post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD

PTSD happens after a very scary event like a car accident. You may replay the event over and over in your mind. You may have a lot of anxiety around things that remind you of the event. You may try to avoid things that remind you of the event.

Schizophrenia

People with schizophrenia have a symptom called psychosis. Symptoms are caused by a health problem. They show you that something is wrong.

Psychosis means that you can't tell the difference between what is real and what is not real. Psychosis is made up of two parts. The first part is seeing or hearing things that are not really there. Most people who have a psychosis hear voices or sounds that are not real. The second part of psychosis is a strong belief in something that cannot be true. For example, you might believe that you have special powers or believe that someone else can read your thoughts.

Schizophrenia also changes the way you think. Schizophrenia makes it hard to think clearly, speak clearly, remember things, concentrate, or get things done.



Eating disorders

Eating disorders change the way you think about food and your body. You may believe you are bigger than you really are. You may think that you would be better if you were thinner. Some people with eating disorders do not eat enough to be healthy. Other people eat a lot at once and then get rid of the food from their bodies.

Eating disorders are about more than food. They may be a way to control things in your life. They may be a way to cope with difficult feelings.

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder or ADHD

There are three parts to ADHD.

- Problems paying attention. It makes it hard to concentrate on one thing at a time or plan things. You might make a lot of careless mistakes or forget things you need.
- Problems sitting still. This is also called hyperactivity. You might feel very restless and feel like you have to move around.
- Problems controlling urges. You may act before you think or take a lot of risks.

ADHD starts when you are a child and can stay with you as an adult. Some people are not told that they have ADHD until they are adults.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

The first person to talk to is a doctor. Some health problems have signs that look like mental illnesses. Your doctor will see what else might be causing problems.



Your doctor may also ask you to see a mental health specialist. This is usually a psychiatrist or psychologist. These specialists have extra training in mental health. Your doctor can refer you to a mental health specialist or show you where to find a specialist.



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Mental illnesses can be treated. If your doctor or a mental health expert finds a mental illness, you will start treatment.

There are many different kinds of good treatments for mental illnesses. Treatment will depend on the illness and how it affects your life. It will also depend on your own wishes.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is also called therapy. Psychotherapy can be very helpful for different kinds of mental illnesses. You talk through problems with a counsellor. They help you learn new skills to deal with problems. You work together until you can use the skills on your own. There are many different kinds of psychotherapy to help with different problems.

You can find a counsellor through your doctor, your school, or your work. You can also learn skills in books, online or through support groups.

Medication

Medications can make some mental illnesses easier to manage or lessen some symptoms. They can be very helpful and they are safe. There are different kinds of medications. Each medication works a bit differently. You will work with your doctor to find the best medication for you.



Support groups

Support groups are places to meet with other people who are dealing with the same problem as you. You can share information, learn from others and support each other. There are many kinds of support groups.

To find support groups in your community:

- Ask a doctor or a counsellor.
- Contact your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. You can find the contact information at www.cmha.bc.ca.



Self-care

Self-care includes small things you do every day to take care of your health and feel your best. You can do a lot of little things to help manage symptoms of a mental illness. Here are some things to try:

- Try to get enough sleep every night. Sleep has a big part in the way we feel. When you are tired, it is hard to deal with problems or see problems in a balanced way. Talk to your doctor if you cannot sleep well.
- Try to get some exercise every day. Exercise helps lift your mood and deal with anxiety. Even small changes, like walking, can make a big difference.

- Try to eat as well as you can. Eating too much fast food or junk food may not help you feel your best. It can be hard to prepare regular meals when you have a mental illness. Even small changes help so do what you can. You can talk to a dietitian for free by calling HealthlinkBC at 8-1-1. Say the name of the language you need in English to get an interpreter.
- Avoid alcohol or other drugs. They can help people hide feelings for a short time, but people usually feel worse in the end. They can also stop medication from working properly. If you are having a hard time reducing your drinking or drug use, talk to a doctor or counsellor.
- Look for ways to lower stress. Yoga, meditation, or gentle exercise may help.

Talk to your doctor or counsellor for more self-care ideas.



Where do I go from here?

Learn more about mental illness from these resources:

BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use Information

Visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca for information sheets and other useful information. You can learn more about mental health and substance use problems. You can read stories and connect with others. There are workbooks to help people with mental illnesses. There are three booklets to help you: dealing with a diagnosis of a mental illness (when your doctor says you have a mental illness), working with your doctor, and preventing relapse of a mental illness. These booklets are available in English only. You can also learn more about mental health organizations in BC.

BounceBack® program

BounceBack is for people dealing with low mood, stress, or anxiety. You learn skills in an online course. You can also talk with a trained worker called a “coach” on the phone. The program is free. Telephone coaches speak English, French, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Punjabi. Bounce Back is run by the Canadian Mental Health Association. Visit www.bouncebackbc.ca for information on the BounceBack program.

This booklet was written by the Canadian Mental Health Association’s BC Division. It is based on current research and resources. We also check key facts with doctors and other mental health experts. Please contact us if you want to know what resources we used.

Founded in 1918, CMHA is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians.

bc.cmha.ca



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Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Colombie-Britannique
La santé mentale pour tous



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information you can trust