

# Mental Health Guide

A Comprehensive Overview



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## Introduction

Living with mental illness is a challenge, and often the effects of living with mental health challenges extend to friends and family. A person affected by mental health conditions faces the ups and downs on the road to recovery—from diagnosis and treatment to managing their wellness to balancing work, school and mental health. But more often than not, the journey on that road to recovery can involve parents, siblings, partners, grandparents and children, too.

Living with mental illness is a challenge, and often the effects of living with mental health challenges extend to friends and family.

## About the affiliate/How can NAMI help?

# An Overview of Mental Health Conditions

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In the United States, one in five people will face a mental health condition in their lifetime. Diagnosing mental illness can be a complicated process that can take years, as there is no uniform medical test.

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## An Overview

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Health care providers consult the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) to identify symptoms to diagnose mental health conditions. Treatment varies from illness to illness and person to person, but it is critical to have a good system of care in place and a holistic approach to recovery.



## What is Mental Illness?

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Mental illnesses are conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and/or daily functioning. Although we often use the term "mental illness" to refer to all mental health challenges, it is important to remember that this term refers to many different conditions and diagnoses, and that each person's experience with mental health issues is unique.

# What Causes Mental Illness?

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Modern science cannot yet pinpoint the cause of mental illness. However, researchers generally agree that multiple factors play a role, rather than a single cause. Mental illnesses have nothing to do with personal weakness or lack of character. Examples of possible factors: trauma (including generational trauma), genetic predispositions, environment, biochemistry, chronic stress and serious loss.

## Specific Mental Health Conditions

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This chapter provides detailed information about various mental health conditions, their symptoms, and treatment approaches.

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## Anxiety Disorders

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Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States. Over 40 million adults in the U.S. (19.1%) have an anxiety disorder. Meanwhile, approximately 7% of children aged 3-17 experience issues with anxiety each year.

## Common Symptoms

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Anxiety disorders are a group of related conditions, and each has unique symptoms. However, all anxiety disorders have one thing in common: persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening.

## Emotional symptoms

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Feelings of apprehension or dread, feeling tense and jumpy, restlessness or irritability, anticipating the worst and being watchful for signs of danger.

## Physical symptoms

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Pounding or racing heart and shortness of breath, sweating, tremors and twitches, headaches, fatigue and insomnia, upset stomach, frequent urination or diarrhea.



# Bipolar Disorder

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Affecting at least 6 million Americans, bipolar disorder is characterized by dramatic shifts in a person's mood, energy and ability to think clearly. People with bipolar have high and low moods, known as mania and depression, which differ from the typical ups and downs most people experience.

## Common Symptoms

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Bipolar disorder is characterized by both manic and depressive episodes.

### Symptoms of mania

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Irritable mood, overconfidence or extremely inflated self-esteem, increased talkativeness, decreased amount of sleep, engaging in risky behavior, racing thoughts, unpredictable behavior, impaired judgement.

### Symptoms of depression

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Diminished capacity for pleasure or loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, a long period of feeling hopeless, helpless, or low self-esteem, decreased amount of energy, feeling constantly tired, changes in eating, sleeping, or other daily habits, thoughts of death and/or suicide attempts, decision-making feels overwhelming.

