

What is Mental Illness?

Mental illness, also called mental health disorders, refers to a wide range of mental health conditions — disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors.

Types of Mental Illness

Commonly diagnosed mental illnesses include:

Anxiety disorders: People with anxiety disorders respond to certain objects or situations with fear and dread, as well as with physical signs of anxiety or panic. An anxiety disorder is diagnosed if the person's response is not appropriate for the situation, if the person cannot control the response, or if the anxiety interferes with normal functioning. Anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias.

Mood disorders: These disorders involve persistent feelings of sadness or periods of feeling overly happy, or fluctuations from extreme happiness to extreme sadness. The most common mood disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, and cyclothymic disorder.

Psychotic disorders: Psychotic disorders involve distorted awareness and thinking. Two of the most common symptoms of psychotic disorders are hallucinations and delusions. Schizophrenia is an example of a psychotic disorder.

Eating disorders: Eating disorders involve extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors involving weight and food. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder are the most common eating disorders.

Personality disorders: People with personality disorders have extreme and inflexible personality traits that are distressing to the person and/or cause problems in work, school, or social relationships. In addition, the person's patterns of thinking and behavior significantly differ from the expectations of society and are so rigid that they interfere with the person's normal functioning. Examples include antisocial personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, and paranoid personality disorder.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): People with OCD are plagued by constant thoughts or fears that cause them to perform certain rituals or routines. The disturbing thoughts are called obsessions, and the rituals are called compulsions.

Other, less common types of mental illnesses include stress response syndromes (formerly called adjustment disorders), dissociative disorders, factitious disorders, sexual and gender disorders, somatic symptom disorders, and tic disorders.