

# Knowledge is Power

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**Good mental health is within most people's reach and is largely a matter of awareness and prevention. Even though most mental illnesses are biologically-based, there are steps people can take to prevent mental illness from occurring, or getting worse.**

Anxiety and depression are the most common mental illnesses. Knowing the signs and symptoms of these, and other illnesses, and knowing when, where and how to ask for help are the keys to successful prevention and treatment.

## Adult Mental Health

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Warning signs of mental illness in adults can include:

- Confused thinking
- Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability)
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows
- Excessive fears, worries and anxieties
- Social withdrawal
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Strong feelings of anger
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Denial of obvious problems
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments
- Substance abuse

If these, or other unusual or troubling behaviors, persist for two weeks or more, it may signal a mental illness that, with timely treatment, can be successfully managed or cured.

With proper treatment 70 to 90 percent of people with mental illness experience significant improvement in their symptoms and quality of life.

There are a few simple things that people can incorporate into their lives to help maintain good mental health:

- Take care of your physical health
- Practice proper nutrition
- Get plenty of rest
- Exercise
- Consume moderate amounts of caffeine and alcohol

Try working these positive ideas into your routine:

**Establish a regular meditation or exercise practice**—solitary or with a group, what's important is that you take time away from the hectic pace of your daily routine.

**Nurture your friendships**—it's well known that the support and companionship of others enhances health and longevity.

**Organize yourself**—prioritize tasks and don't over-schedule; it's okay if the laundry doesn't get done today, that's what tomorrow is for.

**Take time to learn something new**—a language, a skill, a hobby.

**Teach others**—volunteer for an organization that shares your values and interests.

**Be kind to yourself**—recognize your gifts, celebrate them and then extend that kindness to others.

## Pediatric Mental Health

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Children may exhibit different signs and symptoms than adults. That's because children may act out of their fears, worry or sadness rather than talk about it.

Warning signs of mental illness in younger children can include:

- Changes in school performance
- Poor grades despite strong efforts
- Excessive worry or anxiety (i.e. refusing to go to bed or school)
- Hyperactivity
- Persistent nightmares
- Persistent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

Warning signs of mental illness in adolescents can include:

- Substance abuse
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Change in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Excessive complaints of physical ailments
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism
- Intense fear of weight gain
- Prolonged negative mood, often accompanied by poor appetite or thoughts of death
- Frequent outbursts of anger