

## MAY PREVENTIVE HEALTH TOOLKIT

# Mental Health Awareness

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Just like physical health, you also have mental health, and it's equally important for your overall well-being. Your mental health affects how you think, feel, and relate to others. One in five U.S. adults experience mental illness each year. Understanding that you aren't alone, and that mental illness is common, helps to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.

There can be many factors that may add to the risk of mental illness, including traumatic life experiences, chronic medical conditions, biological or genetic factors, chemical imbalances in the brain, alcohol or drug use, and social isolation. The best way to celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month and overcome the stigma is to talk openly about mental health. If you or someone you know needs help, review this toolkit for helpful resources that include how to connect with professional support services.

Learn more with the activities in this toolkit:

- **Mental health continuum**
- **Mental health bingo**
- **Mental health providers - explained**
- **Seeking mental health support**



**People with depression have a 40% higher risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than the general population. People with serious mental illness are nearly twice as likely to develop these conditions.** (Source: [NAMI](#))

### ? Questions?

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# Health disparities

Health disparities are preventable differences in health between groups of people due to race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, education, economic status, where they live, disability, etc. Health disparities are a complicated and challenging problem around the world. The health of a community is shaped mostly by social factors. For example, having access to healthcare, a safe area to live, racial equity, healthy food, good education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all very important to overall health.

People who face health disparities often have poorer mental health outcomes. Although mental illness impacts all groups, several demographics experience unique mental health challenges. Economic hardship, a lack of culturally competent care, and the stigma surrounding mental health in certain groups can prevent people from seeking the support they need.

## Did you know?

- Across every racial or ethnic group, female young adults aged 18 to 25 were 1.5 to 1.9 times more likely than male young adults aged 18 to 25 to experience mental illness. (Source: [NSDUH](#))
- The prevalence of mental illness was highest among the adults reporting two or more races (35.2%), followed by White adults (24.6%). The prevalence of mental illness was lowest among Asian adults (16.8%). (Source: [NIH](#))
- LGBTQ individuals are 2.5 times more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance use compared to heterosexual individuals. (Source: [DBSA](#))
- The suicide rate among males in 2022 was approximately four times higher than the rate among females. Males make up 50% of the population but nearly 80% of suicides. (Source: [CDC](#))

For more information, please visit:

- [BIPOC mental health \(MHA\)](#)
- [Mental health resources in the LGBTQ+ community \(HRC\)](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

# Mental health continuum

Mental health is not just about feeling good or bad; it's on a continuum and can change over time. The mental health continuum helps us understand these changes by showing how mental health can shift from "thriving" to "surviving" and beyond. For example, when someone is "thriving" they might handle stress well, maintain strong relationships, limit alcohol use, and regularly get a good night's sleep. But stress, or other unexpected challenges can move someone to a "struggling" or "in crisis" state. The good news is that mental health can improve with the right support and self-care.

Tracking your mood and position on the continuum can be helpful because the way you feel, think, and act are all linked. How you feel impacts how you think, how you think affects how you act, and how you act influences your feelings. Being aware of these changes is important for managing your mental health. Review the different phases of the continuum on the next page and find where you are right now.

## SYMPTOMS

 <b>THRIVING</b>	 <b>SURVIVING</b>	 <b>STRUGGLING</b>	 <b>IN CRISIS</b>
<b>"I got this!"</b>	<b>"If I could only..."</b>	<b>"When is this going to end?"</b>	<b>"I can't take it anymore!"</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normal mood fluctuations</li> <li>Normal sleep patterns</li> <li>Physically and socially active</li> <li>Good energy level</li> <li>Limited or no alcohol use/gambling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irritable, nervous or sad</li> <li>Trouble sleeping</li> <li>Decreased social activity</li> <li>Low energy, muscle tension, headaches</li> <li>Regular but controlled alcohol use/gambling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anger, anxiety, pervasive sadness, hopelessness</li> <li>Restless or disturbed sleep</li> <li>Social avoidance</li> <li>Fatigue, aches and pains</li> <li>Alcohol use/gambling hard to control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive anxiety, easily enraged, depressed mood</li> <li>Unable to fall or stay asleep</li> <li>Social isolation</li> <li>Exhaustion, physical illness</li> <li>Alcohol/gambling abuse or addiction</li> </ul>
ACTIONS AND RESOURCES			
Self-care and Social Support		Professional Care	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain healthy lifestyle</li> <li>Identify and nurture support systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimize stressors and use healthy coping strategies</li> <li>Consider seeking help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek social support instead of withdrawing</li> <li>Seek help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek help now!</li> <li>Follow health care provider recommendations</li> </ul>

Consider creating a daily mood tracker, writing in a journal, or using a mood tracking app. If you track your mood throughout the day, week or month you might see patterns that start to develop. For example, if you notice that you tend to feel frustrated on Saturday mornings, you can look into why that might be. Is there a list of chores to be done each weekend that you don't want to do? Are your weekends too busy? Not busy enough? Identifying things that influence your mood can be challenging and take time. Keep in mind that it's common to move between phases, so having a plan for each is helpful. You can use the boxes below to write down strategies that will help you when you're in each phase of the continuum.

<b>THRIVING</b>	<p><b>Strategies to stay in this zone</b> (e.g., continuing the healthy activities you enjoy):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>SURVIVING</b>	<p><b>Strategies to get back to thriving</b> (e.g., healthy eating, sleep habits, and activities):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>STRUGGLING</b>	<p><b>Consider seeking outside help</b> (e.g., social support—calling a friend, getting advice from a coworker, or asking a partner for help with tasks/chores):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3. Consider seeking outside professional help.</li> </ol>
<b>CRISIS</b>	<p><b>Text or call 988. Seek help.</b></p> <p>Consider using the "resources" and "seeking mental health support" pages.</p>

# Mental health bingo

Many things can positively impact your mental health, like moving your body more, taking a mindful walk in nature, or eating a nutritious meal. All these things can help maintain or boost your mental health.

During the month, complete as many activities as you can to make a bingo on the card below. If you're already doing the activity, cross it off. You can cross off more than one square each day.

B	I	N	G	O
Plan healthy snacks or meals for the week	Read or log your mood/emotions in a journal	Celebrate an accomplishment	Breathe in and out deeply for two minutes	Call or video chat with someone you haven't talked to in a while
Spend time on a meaningful hobby	Show compassion with yourself when you slip up (e.g., positive self-talk)	Thank someone or write a gratitude letter	Hug a friend or pet	Spend time outdoors
Take 30 minutes away from technology	Spend quality time with friends or family	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	Write down three things you are grateful for	Work on a goal or complete an item from your to-do list
Get a good night's sleep	Do some form of exercise	Listen to a favorite song/playlist or uplifting music	Identify what's inside and outside of your control	Try yoga, meditation, or stretching
Take a mindful pause during a busy moment or take a break during a busy day	Do something kind for someone else	Avoid alcohol or drug use	Laugh or make someone else laugh	Drink at least eight glasses of water a day

# Mental health providers - explained

There are several types of mental health professionals. While there's a lot of overlap in the care they provide, there are differences in their education, approaches to treatment, and scope of practice.

**Counselor/Social Worker:** Counselors and social workers specialize in specific life issues like stress, anxiety, depression, grief, thoughts of self-harm or suicide, or addiction. They help patients to better understand the nature of their problem and work with patients to find solutions.

**Therapist:** Rather than focusing on solution-focused support like counselors and social workers, therapists specialize in providing psychotherapy. Many therapy programs focus on identifying the psychological issues behind mental health concerns and work toward resolving the underlying issue.

**Psychologist:** Like counselors, social workers, and therapists, psychologists are also mental health professionals. Psychologists receive extensive training that gives them the ability to provide long-term counseling and in-depth assessments. They often treat patients with more serious or severe mental health issues.

**Psychiatrist:** Psychiatrists are medical doctors that are able to prescribe medications. They typically work with patients that require a combination of medication and counseling to manage their mental health conditions.

## Seeking mental health support

*These resources are available to anyone, regardless of insurance, unless otherwise noted\*.*

If you think you need to seek professional help to support your overall mental health, you're not alone. According to the CDC, in 2021, 70 million Americans sought professional mental health support. Much like physical health, there are many tactics you may use to support your mental health. Additionally, there are times when professional help is needed to support physical or mental health.

***If you're in crisis, thinking about suicide, or are concerned about someone who might be, **call or text 988** to talk with someone at the National Suicide Hotline. You can also call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.***

## Four steps to accessing professional mental health support

**Step 1:** Ask yourself the following questions:

*If you answer yes to any of these, continue to step 2.*

- Would it help to have a professional guide me through a change, loss, or challenging time?
- Are there things I want to say that need to be kept confidential?
- Am I out of ideas and need to add some different tools to my toolbelt?

## **Step 2:** Find a professional and make an appointment

- Talk to your primary doctor, who'll provide support or refer you to a mental health provider.
  - Call the Customer Care number\* on the back of your insurance card and ask for help locating mental health providers.
- Your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may offer free, short-term counseling. If your employer offers an EAP, the information is likely included with other benefit information, or you can ask your HR department or supervisor.

## **Step 3:** Before/during your appointment

- Consider what you want to get out of your time with the provider and think about what goals you have.
- Be prepared for an initial assessment. The therapist may have some standardized questions to better understand your history and needs.
- Create a list of questions you might have, and feel free to take notes during the appointment.
- Remember that these appointments are confidential\*\* and being open and honest with the provider will best help support your needs.

## **Step 4:** After the appointment

- Your provider will likely provide suggestions for future appointment frequency. It may be best to schedule some of the follow-ups at the appointment if that's possible.
- Your provider may provide handouts or suggestions. Come up with a plan to follow up on your agreed-upon tactics between appointments. How can you prioritize your plan to keep your health front and center?
- If able, engage family and friends with your plan.
- Remember, any change is hard and takes active work. Try not to be discouraged if it's a slower process than what you were expecting.

*\*Health plan members only*

*\*\*Providers have a duty to report information during sessions if they believe there is a risk to a person (e.g., a patient reports a plan to harm someone).*

# **Resources**

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

[Mental Health America](#)

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

[Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#)

[How Right Now \(CDC\)](#)