



Understanding mental health

Mental health is a term that's talked about more and more, but what does it really mean? In this factsheet we explore definitions of mental health and help raise awareness of the different kinds of mental health problems people may experience.



Mental health and wellbeing

The UN defines mental health as: ‘a positive concept related to the social and emotional wellbeing of people and communities’.

As a concept, it can refer to how much we enjoy life, how fulfilled we feel, our ability to cope with change in life and how connected we are to our communities.

Mental health, like physical health, doesn't stay the same. It can vary from day to day, month to month, or in response to particular life events.

All of us have bad days and can feel low from time to time. How equipped we feel to deal with life depends on a number of factors at any given time.

Different kinds of mental health problems

Mental health problems affect one in four of us in the UK. The charity MIND defines mental health problems as affecting the way you think, feel and behave.

Even though we're talking mental health increasingly openly, misunderstanding and stigma still exist.

Below is a list of some of the most common mental health problems. It's not a complete list: conditions such as eating disorders and addiction are also related to mental health problems.

Anxiety

Anxiety is best described as a feeling of unease or worry. While most of us worry about something from time to time, anxiety can be a prolonged state of worrying about one or many things frequently or constantly.

Bipolar

Bipolar disorder manifests itself as extreme changes in mood. Intense joy might rapidly become extreme sadness for no apparent reason. This unpredictability makes bipolar disorder difficult to cope with.

Depression

A persistent state of feeling down, depression can make you feel sad some, most or all of the time. It may come with feelings of hopelessness, fatigue, despair and losing interest in the things you enjoy in life.

OCD

Obsessive compulsive disorder, or OCD for short, is a set of repetitive behaviours and feelings that cause distress to the individual. Obsessive thoughts, repeated behaviours and unwanted emotions tend to characterise the disorder.

Personality disorders

Personality disorders are defined as thoughts, feelings and behaviours that influence you to act a certain way. These repetitive patterns of behaviour get in the way of you living your life the way you'd like.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia disconnects you from your feelings. You may experience hallucinations (seeing or hearing things others don't) or delusions (strong beliefs others don't share); both are both types of psychosis.

Mental health at work

Work has a major impact on our mental health, as we spend so much of our time in the workplace.

Your job can be a positive influence as it gives you purpose, connects you with others and provides an income. However, work can also cause worry and stress, which can throw our mental health out of kilter.

It's really important to recognise signs that you're feeling under strain so you can get help. You are entitled to certain legal protections at work, including reasonable adjustments such as flexible working.

Help with mental health

There are also steps you can take if you feel your mental health is being affected:

- Reflect on causes or triggers for your stress
- Talk to your employer about ways to minimise stress at work or adjustments that would help you cope
- Focus on your basic needs – are you getting the right food, sleep and exercise?
- Look for help online – MIND recommends the Stress Management society and Be Mindful websites
- Visit your GP for help if you are finding things difficult to cope with



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