

Understanding behavioral health

Quick reference guide



Millions of people in the U.S. are affected by behavioral health issues each year.¹

Since mental health is tied to so many crucial human functions, it can improve how we live day to day. Focusing on mental health care can also help us lower our chances of developing physical health conditions. Learning how to understand mental health issues may be helpful in treating patients with vision impairments.

What is behavioral health?

Behavioral health (or mental health) are terms used to describe a number of problems that may affect your mental well-being. When we talk about behavioral health, it includes stress, anxiety, depression, mood disorders or other psychological issues. Behavioral health disorders may also include things like substance use disorders, eating disorders or psychotic disorders.

Taking care of mental health is important for overall health. A patient's emotional state may impact their physical health. Seeking treatment may help a patient feel better and live a healthier life.

How do behavioral health problems begin?

Behavioral health problems are very personal and different for everyone. Worries, emotions and feelings may lead to problems at any time and at any age—even in children. Sometimes there may be a higher risk if there's been abuse² or trauma³ in your past. There may be a higher risk of mental health issues if you have a family history of mental health disorders.⁴

Biological, social, emotional and environmental factors may also contribute to mental health issues. Some mental health issues, like depression, may happen because of a chemical imbalance in the brain.⁵ Even social problems like bullying may affect our mental health and how we may deal with day-to-day life.⁶



What are common signs of behavioral health problems?

Some of the signs of mental health problems may not be easy to spot — and some may be harder to notice than others. The following signs may be a signal that a patient is suffering from behavioral health problems and may need help:

Eating or sleeping too much or not enough	Losing interest in people and activities	Feeling hopeless
Aches and pains	Aches and pains	Drinking alcohol too much or using drugs
Irritability and anger	Thoughts of harming oneself or others	Thoughts of suicide

While these may be some clues to look for, this list doesn't cover it all.

You can learn more and review a full list of behavioral and mental health concerns and helpful information about each at [mentalhealth.gov](https://www.mentalhealth.gov).



Common mental health problems

Anxiety

Many people may have experienced at least some anxiety at one time or another. Anxiety might happen as a reaction to relationships, health, school, work, finances, unexpected changes, big life events – any number of things. At times, anxiety may be considered a healthy emotion – in some moments, it may alert you to pay better attention to your mental health.

An anxiety disorder is defined as having racing thoughts or feelings paralyzed by fear, or when thoughts feel out of control.⁷ More than 40 million adults in the United States alone are impacted by anxiety disorders.⁸

Although the exact cause of anxiety is unknown, research points to the fact that genetic factors and negative events or stressful life experiences may play a role. Some health conditions or medication side effects may also produce or aggravate symptoms.⁹

Depression

Depression may show itself differently for different people. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, the 2 most common forms of depression are:¹⁰

- **Major depression**

This is having symptoms of depression most of the day, every day, for at least 2 weeks. Symptoms may keep patients from daily activities, like sleeping, eating, working and enjoying life. An episode of major depression may happen once in a lifetime or several times.

- **Persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia)**

This is having symptoms of depression that last much longer, typically for at least 2 years. With this type, patients might have episodes of major depression along with less severe symptoms, including loss of interest in activities, low energy or poor concentration.

Stress

Stress is your body's reaction to any situation that causes physical, mental or emotional strain. Everyone experiences stress and reacts to their unique stressors differently. There are 2 main types of stress:¹¹

- **Acute stress:** This is when you experience stress for a short period of time. It's usually positive stress from things like prepping for an interview, training for a marathon or planning to propose to your partner. This kind of stress can cause short-lived and harmless things, like butterflies in your stomach or sweaty palms.
- **Chronic stress:** This happens when you stay at a level of high stress for too long and it can cause some pretty severe symptoms.



Mental health support and resources available for patients

The following list of resources can be shared with patients who might need assistance for behavioral health problems.

Substance Use Helpline — 855-780-5955

Confidential helpline to get support, guidance on treatment options, help finding a network provider and answers to your questions for someone experiencing signs of addiction.

National Domestic Violence Hotline — 800-799-7233 | 800-787-3224 (TTY)

Patients can seek help with crisis intervention, information and referrals to local services for victims of domestic violence.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline — 800-273-8255 | 800-799-4889 (TTY)

If you or someone you know is in suicidal crisis or emotional distress, get emergency help right away. Call the Lifeline for 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress and prevention and crisis resources for you or loved ones who is in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. You can also find 24/7 support through an online chat called [Lifeline Chat](#).

The Crisis Text Line — Text “Home” to 741741

Free resource available 24/7 to help patients [connect with a crisis counselor](#).

¹National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health By the Numbers, ²National Institute for Mental Health, Blueprint for Change: Research on Child and Adolescent Mental Health, ³National Institute for Mental Health, Coping with Traumatic Events, ⁴National Institute for Mental Health, Depression, ⁵Mental Health America, Depression, ⁶stopbullying.gov, Effects of Bullying, ⁷Mental Health America, ⁸National Institute of Mental Health, Social Anxiety Disorder: More than just shyness, ⁹Mayo Clinic, ¹⁰Depression Basics, ¹¹Stress: Signs, Symptoms, Management & Prevention | my.clevelandclinic.org