

# Men and Mental Health

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Men are less likely to receive mental health treatment than women. If you or a man in your life is struggling with mental health, treatment is a game-changer.

Mental health challenges can be difficult for anyone to face. Both men and women of any age can be impacted by poor mental health. But mental illness can cause different symptoms in men than in women, making it some disorders in men harder to recognize. Men who are depressed, for example, may seem angry and grouchy rather than sad and withdrawn. It also may be harder for men with depression to get help. Some may see it as a sign of weakness rather than a treatable condition.

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** PTSD is a type of anxiety disorder. It is caused by witnessing a violent or life-threatening event, such as war. It is common in men, particularly those who have served in combat. Those with PTSD often relive the traumatic event. They are distrustful and always on guard. They have terrifying nightmares. And they feel emotionally numb and detached. They may also have panic attacks, job and relationship problems, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Women may feel on edge or anxious because of PTSD. But men may get angry and aggressive. They may start abusing drugs or alcohol to cope.

**Depression.** Depression affects many men. But it's more often linked to women. Men and women may feel many of the same symptoms of depression, such as:

- Sad or grouchy mood most of the day, most days each week
- Trouble focusing
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Isolating from family and friends
- A major change in appetite and energy
- Lack of ability to feel positive emotions
- Having headaches, body aches, or digestive problems without a clear reason
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness, or worthlessness
- Lack of interest in life
- Suicidal thoughts

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But men and women often show different signs of the condition. Men who are depressed may not cry or talk about their feelings. They may not even hint that they're thinking about suicide. Men with depression may try harder to hide their symptoms. As a result, they may get angry and aggressive. They may also be more likely to seek relief through alcohol or drugs.

**Coping.** If your mental health is suffering, treatment will let you lead a full, productive life. Treatment may include counseling, medicine, or both. You may possibly also be treated with complementary therapies, such as biofeedback. It's important to know that you have nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about. These conditions are not weaknesses. The same goes for any addictions you might have. Many men have trouble communicating what they're feeling. Here are some important first steps:

**Talk to your healthcare provider.** Your healthcare provider is used to dealing with these issues. Don't be embarrassed to bring up your concerns. Your provider can help you get the treatment you need. In some cases, you may be able to resolve your problems with therapy rather than medicine.

**Find healthy ways to share your feelings.** It can be tempting to yell or act out or turn to drugs or alcohol when you are feeling unhappy. Instead of lashing out in anger, try something different. Breathe deeply, count to 10, and give yourself some time to calm down.

**Manage your stress.** Stress at work and at home can worsen the symptoms of many mental illnesses. Don't feel guilty about taking time for yourself to do things you enjoy. You may also want to see if deep breathing, meditation, or stretching help you relax.

**Take care of yourself.** Research suggests that daily exercise can help relieve the symptoms of depression. Get plenty of sleep, and eat healthy meals with lots of fruits and vegetables. Stay away from drugs and alcohol. Being gentle and forgiving with yourself can put you in a better frame of mind to deal with your mood disorder.

**Tell someone right away if you have thoughts of harming yourself.** Call or go to a hospital emergency room. Ask a friend or family member to stay with you. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can be reached at 800-273-8255, TTY: 800-799-4TTY (4889). This line also serves the Veterans' Crisis Line. It offers help in both English and Spanish.

