

Mental Health

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Good mental health, like good physical health, is not something that we have total control over. Certain mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and dementia do have a genetic component. This means that if someone in your family, especially a close relative like a parent or sibling has a mental illness, then your chances of developing the condition are increased.

Although you cannot control your heredity and genetics that may predispose you to psychiatric illness or substance abuse problems, you can control your response to stressors in life and how you deal with anxiety or feelings of depression. You can attempt to learn good coping skills and adaptive behaviors that will improve your chances of success when confronted by the difficulties in life that we all must go through.

Anxiety and Depression

There are many reasons to become depressed or anxious and you don't have to have a family history of depression or anxiety to develop these conditions. Anyone can have depression at some time in their life, although it may not be over the complete time span of one's life or at the level of severity that would qualify for a major depressive episode, as defined by health care professionals.

Anxiety is a normal part of life. There are countless things of a very real nature to worry about day by day for everyone. In fact anxiety disorders, which include phobias, are the most common type of psychiatric illness. Often there is no medication or treatment that needs to be given for some anxiety disorders. Fear of heights or spiders is not something that needs to be corrected necessarily. Instead, most of the time, one can simply avoid the objects or situations that frighten us. We can also become overly anxious with regards to everyday situations, such as going to work or school, being in crowds or driving. When our fear becomes so intense that we begin to avoid people or places and our lives become limited due to the severity of the feelings, we then may have an anxiety disorder and could benefit from treatment for it.

Although we all become briefly depressed over conflicts with others or problems in our lives, however many of us can become so depressed that it affects our energy, appetite or sleeping. Symptoms are more severe when one begins to have morbid thoughts of death or thoughts and plans of suicide. This is the time when seeking help from a mental health professional will be recommended.

Maintaining Mental Health

There are many ways to keep ourselves mentally healthy, and the avoidance of excessive use of drugs or alcohol is one of the best things that we can do. Excessive drug or alcohol use can create symptoms similar to mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia or depression, and it is very difficult to tell the difference.

People who have a genetic or personal predisposition can become anxious, depressed or psychotic under stress. Heavy alcohol or drug usage can often precipitate the development and worsening of mental illness. Often people will use drugs and alcohol as a way of relieving the discomfort of the feelings of anxiety and depression or behaviors which may be inappropriate

and dysfunctional. Learning to deal with the stresses of everyday life without a dependence on drugs or alcohol or inappropriate behaviors is one of the important life lessons that we need to learn in order to cope and lead healthy and successful lives.

If you find yourself being overwhelmed by life stressors and begin to experience symptoms of psychiatric illness, you should not be afraid to seek help from a qualified mental health professional. People often believe seeing a psychiatrist or any other type of mental health professional is a sign of weakness or means that they are "crazy". Some people feel that seeking the help of a mental health professional is a sign of mental illness, rather than as a potential for maintaining long term mental health.

Mental health professionals are often able to help us by pointing us in the right direction with regards to building coping skills for leading stressful lives. This type of guidance and education gives us ways that will increase our chances of success with dealing with stress, rather than allowing life's problems to build upon themselves and worsen over time.

Contrary to what many believe, seeking professional mental help is actually a sign of good personal insight and appropriate coping.