

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Illness

source: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Mental Health Awareness Month is a time to learn to recognize early symptoms of mental illness and the importance of talking about concerns with a doctor or mental health professionals. Early identification and treatment can make a big difference for successful management of a condition.

For example, major depression is a mood disorder that is more serious than “feeling blue” or temporary sadness. Some people may experience it only once, but more than half have at least one additional episode over their lifetimes. Be alert to any combinations of the following symptoms:

- Depressed mood (sadness)
- Poor concentration
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Disturbance of appetite
- Feelings of guilt
- Thoughts of suicide

Bipolar disorder involves cycles of both depression and mania. It is different from the “ups and downs” that most people experience, involving dramatic shifts in mood, energy and ability to think clearly. Symptoms also are not the same in everyone; some people may experience intense “highs,” while others primarily experience depression. Mania involves combinations of the following symptoms:

- Euphoria
- Surges of energy
- Reduced need for sleep
- Grandiosity
- Talkativeness
- Extreme irritability
- Agitation
- Pleasure-seeking
- Increased risk-taking behavior

Schizophrenia is a different type of mental illness, but can include features of mood disorders. It affects a person’s ability to think clearly, manage emotions, make decisions and relate to other people. Symptoms include:

- Difficulty with memory
- Difficulty in organizing thoughts
- Lack of content in speech
- Emotional flatness
- Inability to start or follow through with activities
- Inability to experience pleasure
- Delusions
- Hallucinations

Other types of mental illness include attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders (including posttraumatic stress disorder), borderline and personality disorder. You can learn more about these illnesses on NAMI’s website.

Anyone who experiences symptoms of mental illness should call a mental health professional for a focused discussion about mental health concerns, and assessment of potentially related physical conditions. Education and connecting with others who have walked the same path or are facing similar issues also can play an important role.

Click to request an appointment, or get more information.