

Questions and Answers on Mental Health Disorders

What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a serious brain illness. It is also called manic-depressive illness. People with bipolar disorder go through unusual mood changes. Sometimes they feel very happy and "up," and are much more active than usual. This is called mania. And sometimes people with bipolar disorder feel very sad and "down," and are much less active. This is called depression. Bipolar disorder can also cause changes in energy and behavior.

Bipolar disorder is not the same as the normal ups and downs everyone goes through. Bipolar symptoms are more powerful than that. They can damage relationships and make it hard to go to school or keep a job. They can also be dangerous. Some people with bipolar disorder try to hurt themselves or attempt suicide.

Anyone can develop bipolar disorder. It often starts in a person's late teen or early adult years. But children and adults can have bipolar disorder too. The illness usually lasts a lifetime. People with bipolar disorder can get treatment. With help, they can get better and lead successful lives.

What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

All of us worry about things like health, money, or family problems at one time or another. But people with GAD are extremely worried about these and many other things, even when there is little or no reason to worry about them. They may be very anxious about just getting through the day. They think things will always go badly. At times, worrying keeps people with GAD from doing everyday tasks.

This is a list of common symptoms. People with GAD:

- 1 worry very much about everyday things for at least six months, even if there is little or no reason to worry about them;
- 2 can't control their constant worries;
- 3 know that they worry much more than they should;
- 4 can't relax;
- 5 have a hard time concentrating;
- 6 are easily startled; and
- 7 have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

GAD develops slowly. It often starts during the time between childhood and middle age. Symptoms may get better or worse at different times, and often are worse during times of stress.

Doctors may prescribe medication or ask people with GAD to go to therapy with a licensed social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist. This treatment can help people with GAD feel less anxious and fearful. There is no cure for GAD yet, but treatments can give relief to people who have it and help them live a more normal life.

What is post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD?

PTSD is a real illness. You can get PTSD after living through or seeing a dangerous event, such as war, a hurricane, or bad accident. PTSD makes you feel stressed and afraid after the danger is over. It affects your life and the people around you.

PTSD can happen to anyone at any age. Children get PTSD too. You don't have to be physically hurt to get PTSD. You can get it after you see other people, such as a friend or family member, get hurt. Signs of PTSD may start soon after a frightening event and then continue. Other people develop new or more severe signs months or even years later.

How do I know if I have PTSD?

- 1 Your doctor can help you find out. Call your doctor if you have any of these problems:
- 2 Bad dreams
- 3 Flashbacks, or feeling like the scary event is happening again
- 4 Scary thoughts you can't control
- 5 Staying away from places and things that remind you of what happened
- 6 Feeling worried, guilty, or sad
- 7 Feeling alone
- 8 Trouble sleeping
- 9 Feeling on edge
- 10 Angry outbursts
- 11 Thoughts of hurting yourself or others.

Children who have PTSD may show other types of problems. These can include:

- 1 Behaving like they did when they were younger
- 2 Being unable to talk
- 3 Complaining of stomach problems or headaches a lot
- 4 Refusing to go places or play with friends.

PTSD can be treated. A doctor or mental health professional who has experience in treating people with PTSD can help you. Treatment may include "talk" therapy, medication, or both. Drinking alcohol or using other drugs will not help PTSD go away and may even make it worse. Treatment is not the same for everyone. What works for you might not work for someone else.

What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a serious brain illness. People with schizophrenia may hear voices other people don't hear. They may think other people are trying to hurt them. Sometimes they don't make any sense when they talk. The disorder makes it hard for them to keep a job or take care of themselves.

Anyone can develop schizophrenia. It affects men and women equally in all ethnic groups. Teens can develop schizophrenia. Symptoms of schizophrenia usually start between ages 16 and 30. In rare cases, children have the illness too. Men often develop symptoms at a younger age than women.

Scientists have learned a lot about schizophrenia. They are identifying genes and parts of the brain that may play a role in the illness. While there is no cure for schizophrenia, two main types of treatment can help control symptoms: medication and psychosocial treatments.

Source: Adapted from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) website.

For more information on mental health disorders, go to the website:

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/index.shtml

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