Each year, [at least one in every five Americans experiences a mental illness](#).

Unfortunately, because of the stigma attached to mental health and seeking treatment for it, very few of us are equipped to deal with mental illness in others and in ourselves.

Mental illness can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status or educational level.

In this post, we will talk about common mental health-related symptoms, what to do if you spot them and tips on how to improve your mental health overall.

How to know : 14 common mental health-related signs

1. Loss of energy
2. Loss of interest in your environment: people, events, work and even everyday tasks you used to enjoy no longer excite you.
3. Persistent sadness that lasts beyond two weeks. There is legitimate grief that happens with a major loss such as a death in the family. However, if that sadness persists and begins to interfere with normal daily activity, this is a sign of the onset of mental illness (usually depression).
4. Problems with concentration that affect learning
5. Changes in sleep patterns
6. Changes in eating patterns
7. Changes in sex drive
8. Persistent thoughts of harming yourself and/or others
9. The inability to handle daily problems and stress. For instance, crying over an issue that is easily solvable but which now becomes overwhelming due to the presence of a mental illness
10. Difficulty perceiving reality correctly
11. Periods of high energy with limited sleep
12. Mental illness may sometimes begin to manifest in a person's body in the form of unexplainable "aches and pains" e.g headaches, stomach aches
13. Development of fears (phobias) you never had before
14. Abuse of substances such as alcohol and drugs

What should I do if I recognize any of these signs?

The best step to take after you recognize one or more of these warning signs is to seek help from a professional.

At the very least, talk to a confidant so they can point you to the right resources.

If your workplace has mental health services as an incentive, take advantage of it.

Most workplace mental health services are confidential and you would not need to worry about people finding out about your mental illness.

If you want to keep this part of your life completely separate, that is fine as well.

The key here is to not assume that "things will just blow over". Talking to somebody is essential.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Helpline is helpful if you need to locate resources in your local area to help you with mental illness. They can be reached Monday through Friday from 10am to 6pm ET at 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) or info@nami.org.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can also be reached 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255 and via online chat.

15 tips to improve your mental health

The other piece of good news is that it is possible for you to improve your mental health.

Just like regular exercise and eating healthy food keeps your physical body running properly, so are there activities you can incorporate into your everyday living that will help you maintain and improve your mental health.

1. **Talk to your doctor -** Your primary care physician is an excellent person to initiate the conversation of mental health with. Even if you are not experiencing any of the symptoms discussed above, they will be able to provide you with resources you can turn to should you ever get to that point.

2. **Practice gratitude -** It is healing to pause and be thankful for all that we have. Gratitude quenches the fire of dissatisfaction of life's milestones you may not have not yet achieved but were expecting to have crossed by a set point in your life.

3. **Try journaling -** Journaling has been shown to be effective in helping people become self-aware of a mental problem. Writing down your feelings about everyday events is therapeutic and allows you to become aware of your own emotions - positive or negative. This type of self-awareness can help you create situations that allow you to experience more positive emotions.

4. **Talk to a therapist -** Talking to a therapist should not always be the last resort. It can be an ongoing practice. A therapist will also be able to catch any beginning signs of developing mental illness.

5. **Exercise a few times per week -** Exercises releases endorphins in your brain. Endorphins are well known for [encouraging a sense of well-being](#).

6. **Have a support system -** Having a support system consisting of friends and family is helpful when it comes to improving your mental health.

7. **Adopt a well balanced diet -** Eating well makes you feel well.

8. **Don't be afraid to feel the full range of emotions after an adverse event -** Don't be ashamed to cry if you need to especially after a tragic event.

9. **Sleep more -** This goes without saying. A lack of sleep is always a downward slope to a slew of mental issues.

10. **Travel -** A change in scenery can be medicine in of itself. It does not have to cost you a lot of money either.

11. **Unplug from digital and do something old-fashioned -** Unplug from social media and your cell phone to explore and appreciate nature or do some good old-fashioned reading. These are excellent ways to boost your mental health.

12. **Create boundaries by saying no -** In an effort to be helpful, a lot of people hardly say no to others. Sometimes, it is healthy to say no so you can take care of yourself.

13. **Educate yourself -** Just like you are doing right now!

14. **Set realistic goals -** Putting unrealistic expectations on yourself can create feelings of low self-worth. Set reasonably challenging but realistic goals for yourself.

15. **Quiet your mind -** Some prefer prayer or meditation while others might listen to soft music. Make it a habit to just enjoy at least 10 minutes of quiet time everyday.

Closing Thoughts

Mental illness has no boundaries.

It can happen to anyone.

In this post, we have uncovered some tangible ways to maintain and improve your mental health.

Did you find this post useful?

Please bookmark it or consider sharing it with someone else.