

# Your Mental Health: Identifying a Problem and Seeking Help

2013

**According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), a mental illness is “a medical condition that disrupts a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning.”**

Mental illness, such as depression or anxiety, can affect anyone, at any age. In fact, one in four adults – or 57.7 million Americans – experience some type of mental health disorder each year, according to the National Institute of Health (NIH).

## **Recognizing the signs of depression and other mental illnesses**

A mental illness is not a personal weakness, nor is it something of which to be ashamed. It is a treatable medical condition, like diabetes or high blood pressure. However, like any illness, the solution lies in identifying the problem and seeking the right treatment.

Genetics and certain biological factors are believed to play a role in the development of mental illness, but often it is a challenging life experience – such as the loss of a loved one, or even job stress – that actually triggers the condition. We all have times when we feel a little down, or get overly anxious about an upcoming event, without actually meeting the criteria for depression or an anxiety disorder. However, if you, or someone you know, are experiencing any of the following depression symptoms for more than a few days, you may be dealing with something more than a normal case of the blues:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Irritability or restlessness
- Loss of interest in once-pleasurable activities or hobbies, including sex
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details or making decisions



# Your Mental Health: Identifying a Problem and Seeking Help

2013

- Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness or excessive sleeping
- Change in eating patterns (overeating or appetite loss)
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not ease, even with standard treatment.

## Getting help when you need it

If any of these sound familiar, you owe it to yourself to seek assistance. With professional help, depression and other mental illnesses are very treatable, particularly when caught early. Both the National Alliance for Mental Health ([www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)) and the National Institute of Mental Health ([www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)) have excellent tools on their website for identifying mental illness and evaluating the various treatment methods available. Your college or university's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a great place to start. Most EAPs offer a variety of mental health resources, including articles, quizzes and even counseling. **Contact [your local Human Resources Department]** for more information.

Your doctor also is an important resource for treating a mental illness. He or she will probably want to rule out a medical condition, such as a thyroid disorder, that can cause similar symptoms as depression. From there, he or she may refer you to a mental health professional, who can help point you in the right direction, whether that be medication, counseling, support groups, or a combination of the three.

***No one is alone in the fight against mental illness. Help is out there and we encourage you to get help if you or one of your family members needs it.***

## HEALTHY YOU

Working Together for Your Wellness

