

RECOGNIZING WHEN YOU NEED HELP WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Think about your physical health. We all have days where we feel a bit sore, have a headache, or are extra tired. That doesn't necessarily mean you're sick. You're sick when something suddenly and significantly changes for the worse or prevents you from functioning properly.

Mental health is similar – the occasional bad day is to be expected, but when things that used to be easy become a lot more difficult, something's going on. Instead of focusing on physical symptoms, you'll want to look at your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

WHAT IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONCERN?

A mental health concern is anything that causes a person to believe their mental health may be suffering. You don't need to be diagnosed with a mental health condition to be dealing with a mental health concern.

Common signs of mental health concerns:

ISOLATION:

You used to be really outgoing and positive, but lately, you want to spend most of your time home alone.

LOSING INTEREST:

You aren't as interested in things you used to like – food, music, hobbies, friends, work/school.

TROUBLE FOCUSING:

You can't concentrate enough to follow conversations with friends.

SHORT TEMPER:

You're easily irritated and keep lashing out at people you care about.

Many people struggle with not feeling "sick enough" to seek help early on in their mental health journey. The average delay between symptom onset and treatment is 11 years,¹ meaning a lot of people spend months or years facing mental health challenges before getting a diagnosis. It is never too early to seek treatment – if you want help for your mental health, you deserve to get it.

LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF

It's hard to know when your mental health is slipping if you aren't in touch with yourself or paying attention to your usual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors:

Take some time to think about your daily life.

How is your typical mood? Energy level? Appetite? Sleep routine? Social life? Physical health? When one or more of these things changes significantly, it could be a sign of an underlying mental health concern.

Consider tracking your mood and energy to see if you can find any patterns.

For instance, if you don't have a regular sleep schedule, track the hours you spend asleep each night – you might find that waking up earlier makes for happier days than sleeping in.

Think about other factors that might relate to your mental health.

These could be factors like the weather or spending time with certain people. Maybe you'll realize that rainy days often mean your mood will be a bit lower than usual or that conversations with a certain friend have been draining you lately. Sometimes there's nothing you can do to change your circumstances – but being aware of your triggers can help you manage your expectations and get ahead of taking care of yourself.

LEARN ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

You've taken a great first step by learning how to proactively take care of your mental health. But sometimes, mental health conditions sneak up on you. Some people have mental health conditions and don't realize it – if it's something you've always dealt with, it's easy to assume that's just how it is for everyone. Life can be challenging, but every day shouldn't feel hard or out of your control. If it does, learn more about the symptoms of different mental health conditions to see if something aligns with your experiences.



IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH OR JUST WANT TO CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF, TAKE A SCREEN AT MHASCREENING.ORG.

SOURCES

1 Wang, P.S., Berglund, P.A., Olfson, M., Kessler, R.C. (2004). Delays in initial treatment contact after first onset of a mental disorder. *Health Services Research*, 39(2). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1361014/>