

Mental Disorder Treatment Summary Article

Treatment options

Numerous treatments for mental illnesses are available. The particular treatment or treatments you'll need depends on the type of mental illness you have, the severity of your symptoms, and what you and your doctor think will work best for you. In many cases, a combination of treatments works best.

Medications

Although psychiatric medications don't cure mental illness, they can often significantly improve symptoms, whether you have depression, schizophrenia, an anxiety disorder or another condition. Psychiatric medications can also help make other treatments, such as psychotherapy, more effective.

Here's an overview of some of the most commonly used classes of prescription psychiatric medications:

Antidepressants are used to treat various types of depression and sometimes other conditions. Antidepressants can help improve such symptoms as sadness, hopelessness, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating and lack of interest in activities. Antidepressants are grouped by how they affect brain chemistry, and a number of different types are available. The most commonly prescribed antidepressants are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), such as fluoxetine (Prozac) and citalopram (Celexa). There also are numerous other types of antidepressants; the best one for you will depend on your particular situation and how your body responds to the medication.

Mood stabilizers are most commonly used to treat bipolar disorder, which is characterized by alternating episodes of mania and depression. Mood-stabilizing medications include lithium (Lithobid), divalproex (Depakote), lamotrigine (Lamictal) and others. Sometimes mood-stabilizing medications are added to antidepressants to treat depression.

Anti-anxiety medications, as their name suggests, are used to treat anxiety disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder. They may also be useful in helping reduce agitation and insomnia. These medications are typically fast acting, helping relieve symptoms in as little as 30 minutes. A major drawback, however, is that they have the potential to cause dependency. Anti-anxiety medications include alprazolam (Xanax), lorazepam (Ativan) and several others.

Antipsychotic medications, also called neuroleptics, are typically used to treat psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia. Antipsychotic medications may also be used to treat bipolar disorders or added to antidepressants to treat depression. Antipsychotic medications include clozapine (Clozaril), olanzapine (Zyprexa) and others.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is a general term for the process of treating mental illness by talking about your condition and related issues with a mental health provider. During psychotherapy, you learn about your condition and your moods, feelings, thoughts and behavior. Using the insights and knowledge you gain in psychotherapy, you can learn coping and stress-management skills. Psychotherapy often can be successfully completed in a few months, but in some cases, long-term treatment may be helpful.

Psychotherapy can take place one on one, in a group or along with family members.

There are many specific types of psychotherapy, each with its own approach to improving your mental well-being. The type of psychotherapy that's right for you depends on your individual situation. Examples of psychotherapies include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy (IPT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a common type of mental health counseling (psychotherapy). With cognitive behavioral therapy, you work with a mental health counselor (psychotherapist) in a structured way, attending a limited number of sessions. By helping you become aware of inaccurate or negative thinking, cognitive behavioral therapy allows you to view challenging situations more clearly and respond to them in a more effective way.

Cognitive behavioral therapy can be a very helpful tool in treating mental illnesses such as anxiety or depression. But, not everyone who benefits from cognitive behavioral therapy has a mental health condition. It can be a very effective tool to help anyone learn how to better manage stressful life situations.

Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) is a time-limited treatment that encourages the patient to regain control of mood and functioning typically lasting 12–16 weeks. IPT is based on the common factors of psychotherapy: a "treatment alliance in which the therapist empathically engages the patient, helps the patient to feel understood, arouses affect, presents a clear rationale and treatment ritual, and yields success experiences."

ACT differs from traditional cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in that rather than trying to teach people to better control their thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories and other private events, ACT teaches them to "just notice," accept, and embrace their private events, especially previously unwanted ones. ACT helps the individual get in contact with a transcendent sense of self known as "self-as-context"—the you that is always there observing and experiencing and yet distinct from one's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories. ACT aims to help the individual clarify their personal values and to take action on them, bringing more vitality and meaning to their life in the process, increasing their psychological flexibility.

Brain-stimulation treatments

Brain-stimulation treatments are sometimes used for depression and some other mental health disorders. They are generally reserved for situations in which medications and psychotherapy haven't worked. They include:

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is a procedure in which electric currents are passed through your brain, deliberately triggering a brief seizure. This seems to cause changes in brain chemistry that can quickly reduce symptoms of certain mental illnesses, such as depression. Because it can provide significant improvements in symptoms more quickly than psychotherapy or medications, ECT may be the best treatment option in certain situations. Deciding whether electroconvulsive therapy is a good option for you or a loved one can be difficult. ECT can cause a number of side effects. Make sure you understand all the pros and cons.

Transcranial magnetic stimulation. This approach uses powerful magnets to stimulate cells in the

parts of your brain linked to emotions. This appears to relieve depression symptoms in some people.

Vagus nerve stimulation. This procedure uses a small, battery-powered device (pulse generator) implanted in your upper chest. It connects with a wire to a nerve in your neck that leads to the brain (the vagus nerve). The pulse generator periodically stimulates the vagus nerve. Electrical signals then travel up the vagus nerve to the brain. This is thought to help relieve depression by stimulating brain cells.

Deep brain stimulation. With this procedure, a pulse generator located in your upper chest sends electrical stimulation via wires to areas deep in your brain. This is thought to affect parts of the brain linked to mood, easing depression symptoms. It may also be helpful for obsessive-compulsive disorder. Because it involves brain surgery and chest surgery, this is this is considered a last-resort treatment.

Hospitalization and residential treatment programs

Sometimes mental illness becomes so severe that you require psychiatric hospitalization.

Hospitalization is generally recommended when you aren't able to care for yourself properly or when you're in immediate danger of harming yourself or someone else. Psychiatric hospitalization options include 24-hour inpatient care, partial or day hospitalization, or residential treatment, which offers a supportive place to live.

Substance misuse treatment

Substance abuse commonly occurs along with mental illness. Often it interferes with treatment and worsens mental illness. If you can't stop using drugs or alcohol on your own, you need treatment. Substance abuse treatments include:

Psychological counseling, also called psychotherapy

Medications, which may help ease withdrawal symptoms or reduce cravings inpatient treatment such as withdrawal (detox) treatment.

Outpatient treatment programs, which require regular attendance for a set period of time

Support groups or 12-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Participating in your own care

Be an active participant in your treatment. Working together, you and your doctor or mental health provider can decide which treatment options may be best for your situation, depending on your symptoms and their severity, your personal preferences, insurance coverage, side effects, and other factors. In some cases, a mental illness may be so severe that a doctor, loved one or guardian may need to guide your care until you're well enough to participate in decision making.

Coping and support

Coping with a mental illness can be challenging. Talk to your doctor or therapist about improving your coping skills, and consider these tips:

Learn about your mental illness. Include your family, too — this can help the people who care about you understand what you're going through and learn how they can help. Your doctor or therapist may

provide information directly or may recommend classes, books or websites.

Join a support group. Connecting with others facing similar challenges can help you cope. Support groups for mental illness are available in many communities and online. One good place to start is the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Stay connected with friends and family. Try to participate in social activities, and get together with family or friends regularly. Ask for help when you need it, and be upfront with your loved ones about how you're doing.

Keep a journal. Keeping track of your personal life can help you and your mental health provider identify what triggers or improves your symptoms. It's also a healthy way to explore and express pain, anger, fear and other emotions.

Prevention

There's no sure way to prevent mental illness. However, if you do have a mental illness, taking steps to control stress, to increase your resilience and to boost low self-esteem may help keep your symptoms under control. Follow these steps:

Stick to your treatment plan. Even if you're feeling better, resist any temptation to skip your medications. If you stop, symptoms may come back. You could also have withdrawal-like symptoms if you stop a medication too suddenly. Don't skip therapy sessions, even if you don't feel like going. If you have bothersome medication side effects or other problems with your treatment, talk to your doctor before making changes.

Pay attention to warning signs. Work with your doctor or therapist to learn what might trigger your symptoms. Make a plan so that you know what to do if symptoms return. Contact your doctor or therapist if you notice any changes in symptoms or how you feel. Consider involving family members or friends in watching for warning signs.

Get routine medical care. Don't neglect checkups or skip visits to your family doctor, especially if you aren't feeling good. You may have a new health problem that needs to be treated, or you may be experiencing side effects of medication.

Get help when you need it. Mental health conditions can be harder to treat if you wait until symptoms get bad. Long-term maintenance treatment also may help prevent a relapse of symptoms. Take care of yourself. Getting enough sleep, eating regular, healthy meals and exercising regularly can all help with mental illness.

[Information from the MayoClinic.com](https://www.mayoclinic.com) Dec. 13, 2022