

What Are Mental Health Problems?

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Most of us have had times when we're feeling a bit down or moody. Usually these feelings come and go quite quickly and do not cause us too many problems. But for a while we may feel not very confident, be insecure or we may want some space for ourselves. This is just about the usual ups and downs of life.

Someone who is mentally ill can be diagnosed when this kind of problem lasts for a long time or when they have a very bad effect on the way a person thinks or behaves.

Why do people become mentally ill?

The simple answer is that no one really knows. The workings of the brain are still a mystery. But there seem to be 3 main factors that contribute:

Biological

Sometimes chemicals in the brain are not working properly. Medicine can help to restore a proper balance.

Genetic

This is to do with a family's medical history, there may be a history of mental health problems in a family. However this does not mean everyone in that family will suffer these problems in the future because people's genes are just one small factor.

Environmental

Sometimes things happen in a person's life that they find hard to cope with, such as the death of someone very close to them or the break up of a relationship or the loss of a job.

It is not anyone's fault if someone's mum or dad has mental health problems.

Some people will get well in time but other people may have to keep taking medicine to help them stay well. Even then they may have days when they are feeling down or ill.

Below is a quick look at some of the main mental health problems suffered by people:

Schizophrenia

Some of the symptoms may be:

- False beliefs, e.g. that people are against them
- Hearing voices in their head that are often critical and unpleasant
- Loss of feelings or emotions
- Loss of energy and interest

Schizophrenia affects one person in 100.

Manic Depression (Bi-Polar)

When people are manic (high) these are some of the symptoms:

- Always on the move, taking little sleep, very energetic
- False beliefs, e.g. I had tea with the Queen yesterday
- Doing things without thinking, e.g. running up debts

When people are depressed (low)

- Loss of energy and drive
- Sense of hopelessness and despair
- Withdrawn behaviour, people want to be left alone

Manic depression also affects one person in 100.

Depression

Some of the symptoms are:

- Loss of energy: life may seem empty and meaningless
- Feeling life is hopeless, can't eat or sleep
- Being oversensitive, feeling bad about everything they do
- When very severe a person may feel suicidal

More women than men suffer from depression

Phobias

When someone is totally overcome with fear about something. For example someone who is agoraphobic is scared of open spaces and can't leave the house.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

When someone feels they have to repeat the same act over and over such as washing their hands.

Dementia/Alzheimer's Disease

Some symptoms are:

- Not able to remember, think or reason
- They get easily confused and frustrated

This usually affects people over 60 but can sometimes affect younger people.

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