

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has specialized training in mental disorders. The psychiatrist will decide whether you have a psychiatric disorder. It is not easy to diagnose a mental illness, and you may find yourself getting impatient if you are not told right away what your illness is. Give it time; doctors sometimes need to observe people over a period of time before they can be sure what the proper diagnosis is.

The psychiatrist may suggest that you take medication and may also recommend individual or group counselling. Some people are referred to day-treatment programs which they attend daily for several weeks or months.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Often, people with a serious mental illness need practical help in addition to the psychiatric treatment they are getting. If people have been disabled by mental illness for a long time, or if they became ill when they were quite young, they may need to learn the practical skills we all need in order to live day to day. If you or someone you know could use some help to find affordable housing or to learn how to get a job, to cook or clean, or to balance a chequebook, there may be a community support program available.

In many communities, there are social service agencies which offer housing, vocational and social/recreational programs for people with mental health problems.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

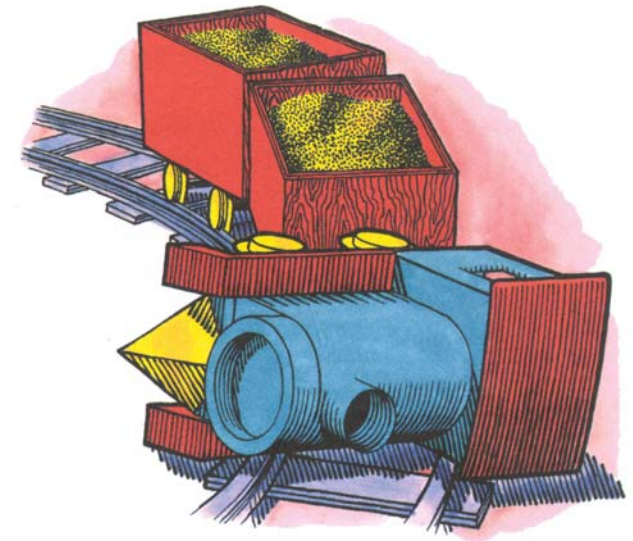
There are many books, booklets and pamphlets which discuss the various mental illnesses in greater detail. Your library is a good place to start. You can also contact community organizations, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association or groups that specialize in particular mental illnesses, to ask for more information about mental illnesses and mental health services in your community.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a nation-wide, voluntary organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. CMHA accomplishes this mission through advocacy, education, research and service.

Visit the CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) today.

## MENTALLY HEALTHY PEOPLE IN A HEALTHY SOCIETY

# MENTAL ILLNESSES



CANADIAN MENTAL  
HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE



Mental illnesses can take many forms, just as physical illnesses do. Mental illnesses are still feared and misunderstood by many people, but the fear will disappear as people learn more about them. If you, or someone you know, has a mental illness, there is good news for you: all mental illnesses can be treated.

## **MAJOR MENTAL ILLNESSES AND THEIR TREATMENT**

Mental illnesses, which can also be called psychiatric disorders, include:

### **Schizophrenia**

The most serious mental illness, schizophrenia affects about 1% of Canadians. Contrary to what many people believe, schizophrenia is not a “split personality.” It is an illness where the most common symptoms include: mixed-up thoughts, delusions (false or irrational beliefs), hallucinations (seeing or hearing things which do not exist) and bizarre behaviour.

Schizophrenia usually strikes in the late teen years or the twenties. Some people have only one episode of very severe symptoms (psychosis). Others have many episodes throughout their lives but manage to live relatively normally between episodes of psychosis. However, some people are more or less continuously disabled by schizophrenia.

The main treatment for schizophrenia is anti-psychotic medication. People with schizophrenia are also often referred to programs in hospitals or community agencies, where they receive counselling and learn to manage their symptoms.

### **Mood Disorders (Depression and Manic Depression)**

These illnesses affect about 10% of the population. Everyone experiences “highs” and “lows” in life, but people with mood disorders experience them with greater intensity and for

longer periods of time than most people.

Depression is the most common mood disorder; a person with depression feels “very low.” Symptoms may include: feelings of hopelessness, changes in eating patterns, disturbed sleep, constant tiredness, an inability to have fun, and thoughts of death or suicide.

People with manic depression have periods of depression and periods of feeling unusually “high” or elated. The “highs” get out of hand, and the manic person can behave in a reckless manner, sometimes to the point of financial ruin or getting in trouble with the law.

### **Anxiety Disorders**

Anxiety disorders affect about 12% of Canadians. They include phobias (unreasonable fear of objects, animals or situations) and panic disorder (a condition where the person has repeated intense episodes of intense, sudden fear and physical symptoms such as difficulty breathing). Another anxiety disorder is obsessive-compulsive disorder, in which a person is unable to control the repetition of unwanted thoughts or actions.

Successful treatment for anxiety disorders include counselling (psychotherapy) and medication.

### **Eating Disorders**

These disorders are most common in men and women under the age of 30. One of the most common eating disorders is anorexia nervosa, a very serious illness that involves drastic weight loss due to fasting and excessive exercise. Without treatment, a person with this disorder can die.

Another eating disorder is bulimia, a disorder that involves binge eating followed by self-induced vomiting, and the abuse of laxatives.

The main treatment for eating disorders is psychotherapy. Medication may also be prescribed.

### **Personality Disorders**

There are many different personality disorders, each with its own medical name. People with these disorders usually have a hard time getting along with other people. They have a lot of difficulty understanding themselves and others, and as a result, may be irritable, demanding, hostile, fearful or manipulative. The symptoms vary from one personality disorder to another.

Personality disorders are the most difficult disorders to treat. The people who have them, in many cases, do not seek help because they are able to live normally in some ways – keeping a job, for example.

It is in the area of relationships with other people that – they run into trouble. They tend to blame the others rather than consider that the problem is within themselves.

Treatment consists of intensive psychotherapy, sometimes supplemented with medication.

### **Organic Brain Disorders**

These disorders affect about 1% of people. They are the result of physical disease or injury to the brain. Organic brain disorders include Alzheimer’s disease, AIDS dementia complex (caused by damage to brain cells by the HIV-virus), and damage from strokes or accidents.

Treatment usually consists of rehabilitation programs.

## **GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP**

If you or someone you know develops the symptoms of a mental illness, it is important to get it diagnosed and to start treatment as soon as possible.

A good starting point is your family doctor who can refer you to a psychiatrist or to a mental health clinic at a hospital or community health centre.