Find Care and Treatment

Find support and build relationships. Knowing that others have encountered similar problems (and conquered them) can be a source of tremendous relief and inspiration. To help people find support from their peers we operate and manage an online community forum were you can express your concerns—or anything else that's on your mind-and get feedback from other people dealing with similar issues.

If you have a mental illness, you won't get better simply through will power or positive thinking. Left untreated, the consequences of mental illness are profound. Debilitating symptoms can lead to unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, even suicide.

Lost wages due to mental illness are estimated to exceed $190 billion in the United States alone.

Fortunately, most treatments for serious mental illness are highly effective. Common treatments include lifestyle changes, one-on-one or group psychotherapy, medications or a combination of any of these. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), between 70 and 90 percent of people who seek care have a significant reduction of symptoms and improved quality of life thanks to today's plentiful treatment options.

The following are key steps to achieving your optimal mental health:

See Your Medical Doctor
Schedule a comprehensive physical with your regular doctor-and be sure to tell him or her about any emotional difficulties you're experiencing. Many physical conditions and treatments, including abnormal hormone levels, and certain medications can cause depression and anxiety. If all checks out physically but you're still suffering mentally, you and your doctor can discuss next steps, including a referral to a mental health specialist-a psychiatrist (usually an MD), psychologist (a PhD) or a licensed clinical social worker (an MSW-master of social work-with training in psychotherapy).
Find a Provider
A referral from your primary care doctor isn't the only way to connect with a mental health expert. Ask friends and family members for suggestions, especially if you know they've had good experiences themselves. National mental health organizations such as SAMHSA (mentalhealth.samhsa.gov) and NAMI (nami.org) can also provide referrals.
Consider Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy, or talk therapy, is widely regarded as a tried-and-true treatment for numerous mental illnesses. Many professionals draw upon a combination of methods to help people understand the causes and triggers of their mood and/or anxiety disorders and to isolate strategies to remain healthy. Keep in mind, psychotherapy can be hard work and situations might seem to get worse before they get better. This is why it's important to work with a specialist whom you trust and feel comfortable talking with-it's not uncommon for people to try different therapists before getting started. Also consider group psychotherapy, a great way to help learn from others, receive validation and feel less lonely.

Consider Medications

Psychotherapeutic drugs have undoubtedly changed the lives of people with mental illness for the better. These medications have helped researchers better understand the biology of various mental illnesses-notably changes in brain chemistry and structure-and they've helped many people manage the symptoms of mood and anxiety disorders, including people with advanced illness unlikely to benefit from psychotherapy.

Medications can only be prescribed by a licensed medical provider-either a doctor or a psychiatrist. However, though psychologists and psychotherapists cannot write prescriptions, they can work closely with other medical providers to ensure that you're being prescribed the best treatment, which may include a combination of medications and psychotherapy.

Above all, you should be well informed about the medications you've been prescribed, including the timeframe in which they are expected to work, potential side effects, correct dosages and what to do if you experience problems. Also be sure to tell your doctor about all medications you're taking to avoid the risk of drug interactions that can reduce the effectiveness of your treatment or increase the risk of side effects.

Just remember, there's no one right treatment for everybody. A combination of different approaches, sometimes through a process of trial and error, is often needed to optimize your mental health.

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