

Health, Mind & BODY



Warning signs of mental health issues

A 2017 study from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimated that 792 million people across the globe lived with a mental health disorder. If that figure is startling, it's likely even greater as a result of the pandemic.

Data from the Kaiser Family Foundation indicated that about four in 10 adults in the United States reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder during the pandemic. That marked a significant uptick since the summer of 2019, when one in 10 adults reported such symptoms.

The pandemic undoubtedly posed significant challenges that affected the mental health of people across the globe. But those challenges won't necessarily go away if and when life returns to pre-pandemic normalcy. Nor is there any guarantee that new challenges that pose a threat to individuals' mental health won't arise in the years to come. That reality underscores the importance of learning to recognize signs of mental illness in both adults and children.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness notes that each mental illness

has its own symptoms, so anyone concerned about their own mental health or the health of a loved one can speak with a mental health professional for more information. In the meantime, the NAMI notes that these are some common signs of mental illness in adults and adolescents.

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Feelings of confusion or difficulty concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or significant feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulty understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feelings of fatigue and low energy
- Changes in eating habits, such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective

reality)

- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality. Some individuals experience a lack of insight known as anosognosia, which NAMI describes as unawareness of one's own mental health condition.

- Overconsumption of substances such as alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes, such as headaches, stomach aches and vague and ongoing aches and pains
- Suicidal thoughts
- Difficulties handling daily life, including an inability to carry out activities or handle problems and stress that arises each day
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

Pre-adolescent children also can experience mental illness, which can manifest itself through these symptoms:

- Changes in academic performance
- Excessive worry or anxiety.



Some children may fight with parents to avoid going to bed or school.

- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

Individuals who are experiencing any of these symptoms or those who recognize them in loved ones, including children, are urged to contact a health care professional, including their general physicians, who may be able to recommend a mental health specialist. More information is available at www.nami.org.



77%
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experience
physical
health impacts
from stress

73%
of people
experience
mental health
impacts from
stress

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of people
have trouble
sleeping due
to stress

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of medical office
visits relate to stress-
related ailments

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The changing nutritional needs of aging bodies



Maureen Boccella, MS, RD, CDCES, LDN, at Chester County Hospital.

• **Protein:** Eating more protein might help older adults avoid loss of muscle mass and diminished strength, which are hallmarks of a condition known as sarcopenia, says

Healthline. A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found those who ate the most protein lost 40 percent less muscle mass than people who ate the least.

• **Calcium:** Bone health is a consideration as a person gets older, says the United States Department of Agriculture. Calcium supports bone health and plays a role in muscle function, hormone secretion and nerve transmission. Calcium can be found in yogurt, cheese, milk, and some vegetables like kale and broccoli.

• **Potassium:** According to Harvard Health, diets that emphasize significant potassium intake can help keep blood pressure in a healthy range compared to potassium-poor diets. Potassium also is necessary for the normal operation of all cells, ensuring proper function of muscles and nerves. While bananas are good sources of potassium, apricots, prunes, orange juice, squash, and some potatoes also contain this often-neglected nutrient.

• **Water:** While not a nutrient per se, water is essential for older adults, who do not feel thirst as readily as they did when they were younger, making them more vulnerable to dehydration. Low-fat milk and unsweetened juices also can help.

Older adults are urged to speak with their doctors or dietitians to discuss their changing nutritional needs.

Getting older requires adapting to the changes that come one's way. The human body is ever-changing and health requirements typically need to be modified as people age. One area that merits consideration is the body's changing nutritional needs. Individuals should know that generally the body absorbs nutrients less efficiently as it ages. That's just one of many changing needs.

• **Fewer calories:** Healthline notes that older adults likely need to eat fewer calories than they did when they were younger since they tend to move and exercise less and carry less muscle. Overeating may lead to gaining extra fat around the belly area.

• **Vitamin B12:** As people age, their stomachs produce less hydrochloric acid, and some medications can make it harder for the body to absorb B12. Adults should speak with a health care provider about whether or not a B12 supplement might be right for them.

• **Fiber:** Regular bowel movements are an important part of staying healthy. Fiber will help support healthy digestion and prevent constipation. Fiber is found naturally in most fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes, according to Penn Health. Men 50 years of age and older should aim for 30 grams of fiber a day, while women should strive for 21 grams, according to

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What is toenail fungus or Onychomycosis?



William E. Donahue, DPM, FACFAS



Jennifer Zienkowski-Zubel, DPM, FACFAS

Onychomycosis is a fungal infection of the nail. It is the most common disease of the nails and creates about half of all nail abnormalities. This condition may affect toenails or fingernails, but toenail infections are particularly common. It occurs in about 10 percent of the adult population.

Onychomycosis accounts for one third

of fungal skin infections. The common symptoms of the fungal nail infection include the nail becoming thickened and discolored. Fungus cases are reported to be either white, black, yellow, green or all of the above. If left untreated, the infection will make nail brittle, painful and embarrassing. Extremely contagious, it can pass from person to person very easily and because of this, it is difficult to clear up. Nail fungus can cause social problems since when having it, an individual will want to hide or cover it up.

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According to the Alzheimer's Association, a certain type of **traumatic brain injury (TBI) can increase a person's risk of developing Alzheimer's or another type of dementia.**



A TBI that results from an impact to the head disrupts normal brain function, and that disruption can elevate the injury sufferer's risk for dementia. The Alzheimer's Association notes that further research into the link between TBIs and dementia risk is necessary, as some people experience TBIs after a blow to the head and do not develop dementia. But the Alzheimer's Association also notes that it is known that cognitive changes after a TBI are among the most common, most disabling and longest-lasting symptoms that result from such injuries, which can affect the ability to learn and remember new information and compromise a person's ability to concentrate, organize thoughts and plan effective strategies for completing tasks.

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How to overcome mental fatigue

Fatigue and exhaustion are often discussed in terms that characterize the physical effects that they have on the body. However, mental fatigue can be just as draining as physical exhaustion, even if its symptoms are not as evident as achy muscles or tired feet.

The online medical resource WebMD notes that mental fatigue typically arises when individuals focus on mentally challenging tasks for extended periods of time. Many individuals also experienced mental fatigue during the pandemic. Pandemic-related restrictions forced individuals across the globe to confront a number of unforeseen, unexpected challenges, including a sudden shift to remote work and school closures that forced working parents to juggle the rigors of their careers with the difficulties of remote learning. That upheaval contributed to prolonged mental fatigue



for many individuals. Much like athletes need routine breaks from exercise to let their muscles recover, individuals need to look for ways to give their overworked minds a chance to recuperate from fatigue. Each person is different, but these strategies can help

people overcome mental fatigue.

- **Take breaks from the news.** Overconsumption of news is one potential contributor to mental fatigue. That's especially so in the digital age, when the latest headlines are never further than a smartphone away. The Johns Hopkins Women's Mood Disorders Center notes that limiting news consumption during stressful times can be an effective way to reduce symptoms of stress, including mental fatigue.
- **Schedule time to relax.** The pressure to feel as if you should always be doing something, whether it's working, taking care of your family or tackling a to-do list around the house, can contribute to mental fatigue. Schedule time to relax and make a concerted effort to keep that time open. Avoid using scheduled relaxation time to work on household chores or check work emails. Instead, use this time to do some-

thing you find genuinely relaxing, even if that activity feels like you're doing "nothing."

- **Spot the signs of mental fatigue.** Another way to overcome mental fatigue is to learn to recognize its symptoms. Recognition of these symptoms allows individuals to use them as alarm bells that alert them when it's time to take a step back and unwind. WebMD notes that mental fatigue symptoms include mood-related issues like increased irritability or anger; difficulty concentrating that makes it hard to finish tasks; zoning out; difficulty sleeping; and engaging in unhealthy behaviors, including overconsumption of alcohol.

The signs of mental fatigue may not be as instantly recognizable as the symptoms of physical exhaustion. But mental fatigue can be just as dangerous as physical tiredness if left unchecked.

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Being able to see and hear well is important for good balance. You can help reduce your risk of falling by taking these simple steps:

- 1. Get an eye exam every year.** Remember to have a dilated eye exam once a year to update your glasses and to detect eye diseases, like cataracts and glaucoma.
- 2. Wear glasses properly.** Use prescribed glasses and avoid wearing sunglasses inside.
- 3. Be safe while wearing bifocals:** If you wear bifocals, tuck your chin in when stepping over curbs and on stairs to look through the distance portion of your glasses, which provides a clearer view. Or wear single vision glasses while outside and on stairs while inside.
- 4. Check for hearing changes.** Get a hearing test once a year and receive treatment if any hearing loss is identified.



5. Light it up! Add a nightlight in the bedroom, bathroom, and hallway to help you navigate in the dark and find the light switch.

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The multifaceted benefits of aerobic exercise



Routine physical activity has a significant impact on physical and mental health. Though the temptation to be sedentary is ever-present and arguably greater than it's ever been, getting up and moving can prolong life and make for happier, healthier days.

There's no wrong way to be physically active, and many health professionals urge people to find a physical activity they enjoy so they're more likely to maintain a commitment to exercise. Aerobic exercise is one option to consider because it encompasses a wide range of activities and pays a wealth of dividends. Running, cycling, hiking, swimming, and even walking are popular forms of aerobic exercise, which benefits the body in myriad ways.

Aerobic exercise and disease prevention

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons notes that a fitness regimen that includes regular aerobic exercise can help people avoid potentially deadly diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and some cancers. Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that aerobic exercise, which organizations such as the American Heart Association advise combining with strength-training exercises at least twice per week, is effective at preventing disease because it helps to control or modify various risk factors for conditions like heart disease.

Aerobic exercise and bone strength

Another notable benefit of routine aerobic exercise is it helps to build stronger bones. Harvard Health notes that various studies have shown that weight-bearing exercises, including aerobic activities like walking or running, put stress on bones which stimulates the formation of extra deposits of calcium and activates bone-forming cells. This process ultimately results in denser, stronger bones, which is a particularly notable benefit for adults over 40, a point in time when bone strength typically begins to decline at a rate of roughly 1 percent each year.

Aerobic exercise and mental health

Harvard Health notes the benefits of aerobic exercise extend beyond the physical and into the mental. That link is neurochemical in nature, as aerobic exercise stimulates the production of endorphins, which Harvard Health notes are chemicals in the brain that naturally elevate mood, contributing to feelings of both relaxation and optimism. While that's happening, aerobic exercise also helps to reduce levels of the body's stress hormones.

Aerobic exercise is accessible and highly beneficial. Individuals of all ages are urged to commit to routine aerobic exercise so they can reap the physical and mental health rewards such a commitment produces.

10 Techniques to Help Promote Relaxation and Reduce Stress

- **Take slow, deep breaths** when you're feeling stressed to help trigger a relaxation response.
- **Practice meditation** and mindfulness to help interrupt negative thought patterns and calm the nervous system.
- **Read, listen to music or create art.** Creative activities can help you focus on the present moment and lead to improved mood.
- **Spend time in nature.** Studies show that even periods as short as 20 minutes can reduce cortisol, boost endorphins and promote a sense of calm.
- **Move and stretch your body.** Almost any form of exercise can help lower stress levels.
- **Laugh to lighten your mood.** Research says laughter can stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation.
- **Start a gratitude journal,** or just take a moment to reflect on what went well in your week or day.
- **Check off a chore** from your to-do list for a quick dopamine boost.
- **Connect with others,** whether in person or over the phone. Positive social interactions can help lower stress hormones.
- **Treat yourself** to a bubble bath, face mask or any self-care activity that makes you feel good.



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