



## Introduction

Mental illnesses are reflective of illness that affect the brain. There are several types of mental illnesses, which include mood disorders (i.e., depression and bipolar disorder), anxiety disorders, psychotic disorders (i.e. schizophrenia), eating disorders, trauma-related disorders, and substance abuse disorders. Mental illnesses can affect all ages, genders, racial groups, and can be hereditary or the result of life circumstances. Untreated mental illness can result in medical and other problems like high blood pressure, sleep problems, and can also lead to suicide.

Did you know that...

- ❖ *1 in 4 Americans suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder.*
- ❖ *African American and Latinos are more likely to be at risk for depression than Whites.*
- ❖ *Minority populations, including African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos use mental health services at about half the rate of white Americans annually.*
- ❖ *20% more African Americans are likely to report psychological distress than White Americans.*
- ❖ *Social problems such as racism, discrimination and sexism is connected to black women being prone to mental health issues.*
- ❖ *Mental illness may present differently based on the type of mental illness, the age or gender of the patient, and other factors.*

Some mental illnesses are episodic and some are chronic. Mental illnesses can be managed in the home environment, but some people must be institutionalized to protect the individual and others from harm and to guarantee appropriate care. There are also services to support individuals, caregivers, and families with mental health issues such as support groups, organizations,

Suicide is one of the extreme complications of mental illness. The annual suicide rate in the U.S. was 14.5 per 100,000 as of 2019. This rate has increased steadily since 2000, when it was 10.4 per 100,000. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. across all ages.

Approximately 78% of completed suicides are by males and 89% are by whites. Approximately 51% of suicides are via firearm 26% via suffocation, and 15% via poisoning.

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### Populations that are at risk for suicide

- **Elderly:** In older Americans, social disconnectedness is associated with higher perceived isolation, depression, and anxiety. Self-isolation further disproportionately affects elderly individuals who do not have close family and friends, or who have decreased literacy in or access to digital resources.

- **Youth:** Preliminary data from England suggests that child suicide deaths may have increased during the first phase of lockdown, possibly due to disruptions to education, extracurricular activities, and support services.
- **Racial minorities:** In Maryland, U.S., progressive closure of businesses from March to May 2020 was associated with decreased daily suicide mortality among white residents but increased daily suicide mortality among Black residents.
- **Unemployed:** The pandemic is predicted to cost 25 million jobs worldwide. Global studies of the Great Recession in the early 2000s found that suicide risk was elevated by 20-30% between 2000 and 2011 with a peak during 2008.
- **Mentally ill:** Individuals with preexisting mental health issues are likely to be affected by illness relapse, interruption in psychiatric services, increased isolation, and possible exacerbation by anxiety due to the pandemic.
- **Healthcare workers:** Medical staff have reported increased hopelessness, guilt, and insomnia, all of which can increase the risk for suicide.

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There are various ways to treat individuals with mental illness, such as cognitive therapy (counseling, support groups, spiritual, Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Eye Movement and Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR)), pharmacological and alternative medicine therapy (uses medications or herbals), or a combination of cognitive and pharmacological therapies. Non-pharmacological therapies like exercise, light therapy, acupuncture, Vagus Nerve Stimulation, and Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation have also been used. The length and type of treatment depends on the severity of the mental illness, and compliance with therapy. Sometimes, individuals try to self treat by engaging in substance use which can compound mental illnesses so this approach is not recommended.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a surge in the incidence of mental health issues, and it has been suggested that the individual, community, and international effects will be present for at least the next decade. Individuals of all ages and backgrounds have reported increases in anxiety, depression, and suicide due to the stress from quarantining, social distancing, school closures, loss of employment, deaths of loved ones, social injustices, remote working, shortages of food and essential items and other causes. Statistics recorded by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention between June 24–30, 2020, show that around 40% of adults in the U.S. reported at least one adverse mental health concern, including anxiety, depression, substance use, and suicidal ideation ([Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020 | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](#)) Distinct mental disorders have surged and emerged since the pandemic that include but aren't limited to COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome, hypochondriasis (fear of objects), Prolonged Grief Disorder. The following table summarizes the symptoms of these disorders.

<b>Symptom Description of Traditional Mental Disorders Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic</b>		
<b>Mental Health Concern</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Depression	Symptoms may include sadness, changes in appetite/weight, socialization, guilt, attention, energy, apathy (interest or ability to enjoy), sleep, worry, agitation.	There are various types of depression (i.e., grief, seasonal, post-partum, etc.).
Anxiety	Symptoms can be generalized (i.e., feeling on edge, feeling negative, unable to concentrate, shortness of breath, unable to carry out tasks, muscle tension).	There are different types of anxiety (i.e., Obsessive-compulsive, post-traumatic, phobias, panic, hypochondriasis, continuous traumatic disorder)
Schizophrenia	Symptoms may include disorganized thinking, hallucinations, delusions, lack of insight of who they are, and their role in life. Their ability to self care may be compromised due to lack of insight. .	There are different types of schizophrenia. Individuals require treatment with prescription medications and should be under the care of medical professionals.
Bipolar disorder	Symptoms include periods of mania and depression. Individuals often have high insight and are able to self-care.	There are different types of bipolar disorder (i.e. bipolar 1, bipolar 2, cyclothymia)

<b>Emerging Mental Health Disorders Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic</b>		
COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome	Symptoms mimic the symptoms of anxiety, PTSD, and OCD with features of avoidance, compulsive symptom-checking, worrying, and threat monitoring (combined).	<p>Manifests as the inability to leave the house because of COVID-19 fears, frequent checking for symptoms despite not being in a high-risk scenario, and avoiding social situations or people.</p> <p>Investigators note that people with this syndrome tend to experience increased post-traumatic stress, general stress, anxiety, health anxiety, and suicidal ideation.</p>
Hypochondriasis (Also referred to as Illness Anxiety Disorder)	<p>Also related to fear of contamination or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)</p> <p>Worldwide there have been reports of increased symptoms, distress, and concern about OCD and also hoarding disorder (<a href="#">Banerjee, 2020</a>) related to COVID-19.</p>	<p>Can be likely related to hospital emergency flow of people who misinterpret their bodily sensations as signs of potential infection (<a href="#">Asmundson and Taylor, 2020</a>)</p> <p>Related to the worry that health care systems may be overrun and that adequate medical care will not be available for all those affected (<a href="#">Thombs et al., 2020</a>)</p> <p>Some patients refuse surgical treatment due to fear of COVID-19 contagion even at the risk of survival (<a href="#">Vanni et al., 2020</a>)</p>
Prolonged Grief Disorder	Characterized by distressing and disabling yearning for the deceased and/or preoccupation with the deceased, accompanied by anger, guilt, and other symptoms indicative of intense emotional pain experienced for at least 6 months after the loss.	It is estimated that the mass bereavement due to COVID-19 will leave behind nearly 16 million newly bereaved people globally. <a href="#">Prolonged grief disorder following the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (nih.gov)</a>
Continuous Traumatic Disorder	Characterized by learning disabilities, panic attacks,	Can be the result of the following experiences:

	<p>dissociative disorders, general sickness, immune deficiency, violent and impulsive behavior, insomnia, substance abuse and addiction later</p>	<p>Long-term bullying, being raised by an alcoholic parent, constant exposure to violence, poverty, police brutality, workplace inequality, homelessness, food insecurity and malnutrition</p> <p><a href="https://blackbearrehab.com/mental-health/ptsd/ctsd-continuous-traumatic-stress-disorder/#the-difference-between-ctsd-and-ptsd">https://blackbearrehab.com/mental-health/ptsd/ctsd-continuous-traumatic-stress-disorder/#the-difference-between-ctsd-and-ptsd</a></p>
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## Facts about Suicide and the Pandemic

- Previous pandemics have been associated with increases in suicide rate.
  - The U.S. reported an increase in suicides during the Spanish Flu of 1918-19.
  - Hong Kong observed an increase in elderly suicides during the 2003 SARS outbreak.
  - Africa experienced an increase in suicides during the Ebola epidemic.
  - Possible risk factors for suicide during pandemics include isolation, fear, marginalization, psychological disorders, economic fallout, and increased domestic abuse.
- Incidence of Suicide during COVID-19 Pandemic
  - SARS-CoV-2 infected 76 million people worldwide in 2020.
  - Economic stress is associated with higher suicide rates. The pandemic has forced many businesses to close or scale back as a result of lockdown measures.
  - Social isolation is associated with increased suicidal thoughts. The main U.S. public health strategy to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 has been social distancing.
  - Participation in religious communities is associated with lower suicide rates. Churches and community centers have also been forced to close, contributing to social isolation and possible higher suicide rates.
  - Continuous media coverage of the pandemic may intensify anxiety and fear for individuals with preexisting mental health conditions.
  - Barriers to mental health treatment that have arisen due to the pandemic include increased restrictions at healthcare facilities.
  - In the U.S., firearm sales have surged, with a 41% increase in March 2020 and >50% increase in August and October 2020, relative to 2019 rates.

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Mental illness can occur at any point in a person's life, but the current events have brought more light onto the seriousness of this problem. As previously mentioned, treatment will minimize poor outcomes in medical health, relationships, and productivity at work and in school. We can all do our part in making sure that we recognize the signs of mental illness and provide the necessary support structure for the individual to avoid negative outcomes.

## **Resources for Addressing Mental Illness**

Community resources are available to also provide information and support to consumers about mental health that discuss symptoms and treatment. The following information will provide information on community resources that can provide support for individuals with mental illness and their families.

### **National Suicide Helpline**

1-800-273-8255

### **National Alliance for Mental Illness FaithNet**

<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet>

### **American Psychological Association**

<https://www.apa.org/topics>

**Gilda's Club:** [www.cancersupportcommunity.org/find-location-near-you](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/find-location-near-you)

### **Support organizations and advocacy groups for patients with Bipolar Disorder or Schizophrenia**

- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP):** [www.AFSP.org](http://www.AFSP.org)
- **Caregiver Action Network (CAN):** [www.CaregiverAction.org](http://www.CaregiverAction.org)
- **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) :**[www.DBSalliance.org](http://www.DBSalliance.org)
- **Mental Health America:** [www.MHAnational.org](http://www.MHAnational.org)
- **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH):** [www.NIMH.nih.gov](http://www.NIMH.nih.gov)
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** [www.NAMI.org](http://www.NAMI.org)
- **The Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America (SARDAA):** [www.SARDAA.org](http://www.SARDAA.org)
- **Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA):** [www.Caregiver.org](http://www.Caregiver.org)
- **International Bipolar Foundation :** [www.IBPF.org](http://www.IBPF.org)

## **University of South Florida Mental Health Resources**

- Counseling Services
  - The USF Counseling Center offers counseling services at the WELL for USF Health Students on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursday Evenings from 4:00-7:00 PM. To request an appointment at the WELL, please contact the Counseling Center directly at (813)974-2831 SVC2124 or [usf.edu/counsel](http://usf.edu/counsel). \*All services are free and confidential.
  - The After Hours Service is available from 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM each weekday, and all day on Saturday, Sunday and University holidays. The service may be accessed by contacting the Counseling Center at 813-974-2831 or 813-974-9403. Press “3” and the call will be transferred to the After Hours Service.
- The Office of Student Engagement and Wellness offers various events throughout the year that focus on mindfulness.
- “Let’s Talk” is a drop-in service at the WELL that offers informal consultations with a USF Counselor on Wednesdays from 11 AM to 1 PM.
  - 15-minute consultation session. No paperwork to complete. \*All services are free and confidential.
- SUCCESS & WELLNESS COACHING is a short-term, action-oriented process that helps you work toward any area of life improvement: health, wellness, relationships, time management, stress management, etc. Coaching is FREE to all enrolled USF students, and you can request to meet with a certified coach at USF Health or whatever it is most convenient for you. To sign up to reach your goals, visit: [bit.ly/WELLCoach](http://bit.ly/WELLCoach)
- Check out <https://www.usf.edu/student-affairs/counseling-center/feel-better-now/mental-wellness-apps.aspx> for info on Mental Wellness Apps

## **Online Resources to Support Mental Health**

- Better Help (world’s largest online therapy service): [www.betterhelp.com](http://www.betterhelp.com)
- ReGain (Couples’ therapists trained in relationship counseling): [www.regain.us](http://www.regain.us)
- Faithful Counseling (licensed counselors specifically for Christians): [www.faithfulcounseling.com](http://www.faithfulcounseling.com)
- Teen Counseling (specialists in counseling who help teens flourish): [www.teencounseling.com](http://www.teencounseling.com)
- Calmerry (Budget-friendly online therapy at home and on the go): [www.Calmerry.com](http://www.Calmerry.com)
- TalkSpace (speak to licensed counselors with a simple, secure app): [www.try.takspace.com](http://www.try.takspace.com)
- PRIDE Counseling (professional therapy for the LGBTQ community): [www.pridecounseling.com](http://www.pridecounseling.com)
- Online-Therapy.com (Complete cognitive behavioral therapy toolbox): [www.online-therapy.com](http://www.online-therapy.com)
- HealthSapiens (24/7 virtual access to behavioral therapists & Medical professionals): [www.healthsapiens.com](http://www.healthsapiens.com)

## **Mobile Apps that Support Mental Health**

Meditation, mindfulness, and breathing techniques can also be useful for addressing anxiety. These techniques may be used with or without pharmacological or cognitive therapies, but should not be used to substitute proper evaluation and treatment by a medical professional. There are many mobile apps available via the Apple Store, Google Store or can be downloaded from the web. The following are a few examples of commonly used mobile apps.

- Standard meditation app: Insight Timer
- Meditation apps for breathing: INSCAPE, iBreathe, Breathe+, Pause Breathwork
- Apps for quick meditation: Oak, Whil, Simple Habit
- Meditation apps for spirituality: Mindfulness with Petit BamBou, Waking Up, Prana Breath
- Meditation apps for a budget: The Mindfulness App, Sattva
- Meditation apps for beginners: Meditation Studio, Let's Meditate, Happy Not Perfect
- Guided meditation apps: Breethe, Headspace, MyLife Meditation
- Meditation apps for sleep: Calm, Buddify

For additional reading:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/top-meditation-iphone-android-apps#our-picks>

<https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2020/getting-started-meditating.html>

## **Resources on COVID and Mental Health**

- **American Psychiatric Association:** Coronavirus Resources: [www.Psychiatry.org](http://www.Psychiatry.org)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** COVID-19: [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)
- **World Health Organization:** Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak: [www.WHO.int](http://www.WHO.int)
- <https://www.borislhensonfoundation.org/>

WE-CARE (Workgroup Enhancing Community Advocacy Research and Education) is the community outreach arm of the Taneja College of Pharmacy at the University of South Florida. Our mission is to close the gap of health care disparities by being a resource for education on health issues that are plaguing diverse populations and to bridge the gap between clinical researchers and the lay community. For further information about WE-CARE, please check out our website at [Overview | USF Health](#) or feel free to contact us at: [TCOP-WE CARE@usf.edu](mailto:TCOP-WE CARE@usf.edu).

WE-CARE collaborates very closely with community agencies to provide services for the community. Thanks to REACHUP, Inc., WE-CARE has an eLibrary of *free* virtual workshops on various topics related to our mission and invite you to check it out at:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEi\\_ZAAM7ILMaRiasr0Wa6dbywDgASgLS](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEi_ZAAM7ILMaRiasr0Wa6dbywDgASgLS)

Executive Director: Kevin B. Sneed, Pharm.D., CRPh

Program Director: Angela M. Hill, Pharm.D., CRPh ([ahill2@usf.edu](mailto:ahill2@usf.edu))

Check out our video:

<https://usf.box.com/s/s09sir6hqogfvciarfsqsr4tb9u3un6o>

*\*Make sure you're using Google Chrome to preview the video.*

