



TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH:

Tips for Talking With Your Health Care Provider



Don't wait for your health care provider to ask about your mental health. Start the conversation. Here are five tips to help prepare and guide you on how to talk to your health care provider about your mental health and get the most out of your visit.



1. Don't know where to start for help? Talk to your primary care provider.

If you're going to your primary care provider for other health concerns, remember to bring up your mental health concerns. Mental health is an integral part of health. Often, people with mental disorders can be **at risk for other medical conditions**, such as heart disease or diabetes. In many primary care settings now, you may be asked if you're feeling anxious or depressed, or if you have had thoughts of suicide. Take this opportunity to talk to your primary care provider, who can help refer you to a mental health specialist. You also can visit the [NIMH Find Help for Mental Illnesses](#) webpage for help finding a health care provider or treatment.



2. Prepare ahead of your visit.

Health care providers have a limited amount of time for each appointment. Think of your questions or concerns beforehand, and write them down.

- **Prepare your questions.** Make a list of what you want to discuss and any questions or concerns you might have. This [worksheet can help you prepare your questions](#).

- **Prepare a list of your medications.** It's important to tell your health care provider about all the medications you're taking, including over-the-counter (nonprescription) drugs, herbal remedies, vitamins, and supplements. This [worksheet can help you track your medications](#).
- **Review your family history.** Certain mental illnesses tend to run in families, and having a close relative with a mental disorder could mean you're at a higher risk. Knowing your [family mental health history](#) can help you determine whether you are at a higher risk for certain disorders. It also can help your health care provider recommend actions for reducing your risk and enable both you and your provider to look for early warning signs.



3. Consider bringing a friend or relative.

Sometimes it's helpful to bring a close friend or relative to your appointment. It can be difficult to absorb all the information your health care provider shares, especially if you are not feeling well. Your companion can be there for support, help you take notes, and remember what you and the provider discussed. They also might be able to offer input to your provider about how they think you are doing.



4. Be honest.

Your health care provider can help you get better only if you have clear and honest communication. It is important to remember that communications between you and a health care provider are private and confidential and cannot be shared with anyone without your expressed permission. Describe



all your symptoms with your provider, and be specific about when they started, how severe they are, and how often they occur. You also should share any major stresses or recent life changes that could be triggering symptoms.



Examples of symptoms include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite or weight changes (or both)
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment



5. Ask questions.

If you have questions or even doubts about a diagnosis or treatment your health care provider gives, ask for more information. If

your provider suggests a treatment you’re not comfortable or familiar with, express your concerns and ask if there are other options. It’s okay to disagree with your provider on what treatment to try. You may decide to try a combination of approaches. You also may want to get another opinion from a different health care provider. It’s important to remember that there is no “one-size-fits-all” treatment. You may need to try a few different health care providers and several different treatments, or a combination of treatments, before finding one that works best for you.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
National Institutes of Health
NIH Publication No. 19-MH-8094