

What causes mental illness?

Science does not yet know the causes of mental illness, though current research suggests that the illnesses are associated with malfunctioning brain neurotransmitters. While there are currently no preventative measures or cures, modern medicines and therapies can control the symptoms.

How are major mental illnesses treated?

Counseling, particularly cognitive behavioral and interpersonal therapies are very helpful, along with peer support, supportive housing, and employment. An expanding range of medications are available at this time that markedly reduce symptoms and improve functioning. Medication is often prescribed to treat or even to help diagnose the illness, though medication compliance can be difficult for some people with mental illness. When treatment includes management of all aspects of the disease, potential for recovery can be greatly enhanced. Most people can profit from community programs that help to build self-confidence, teach living skills, and improve the ability to interact socially with others.

Is recovery possible?

Some people recover substantially, return to work and live a satisfying and well adjusted life. Others need support for all or most of their lives.

The goal is to achieve as much independence as possible and live productive and rich lives. NAMI is taking a front line role in helping people with the increasingly important process of rehabilitation and recovery from major mental illnesses.

What is the community's role?

The role of community is very important when responding to the needs of people with major mental illness, particularly since more than 44 million people suffer from mental illness. Communities can:

- ❖ Help combat stigma
- ❖ Hire people with mental illness for low stress jobs
- ❖ Support funding for community-based support programs
- ❖ Advocate for expanded research into causes and treatment for major mental illnesses
- ❖ Assist with housing needs, as well as opportunities for social activities and volunteer opportunities
- ❖ Educate the community about mental illness, and distinguish the myths and stereotypes that harm and isolate people

Resources:

Recommended reading:

Surviving Schizophrenia: A Family Manual; by E. Fuller Torrey, MD; 2001

Overcoming Depression; by Demetri F. Papolos, MD; 2001

When Someone You Love Has a Mental Illness; Rebecca Woolis; 1992

The Essential Guide to Psychiatric Drugs; by Jack M. Gorman, MD; 1995

Help Me, I'm Sad: Recognizing, Treating and Preventing Childhood & Adolescent Depression; David G. Fassler, MD & Lynn S. Dumas; 1997

I Am Not Sick I Don't Need Help; Xavier Amador, Ph.D.; 2000

Family to Family
NAMI-FL offers a free, in-depth twelve week educational program for family members. For further information call 273-2462

Many valuable resources are available from both the national and state NAMI offices:

NAMI
2107 Wilson Boulevard, 3rd Floor
Arlington, VA 22201
703-524-7600
Fax: 707-524-9094
www.nami.org

NAMI-New York State
260 Washington Ave.
Albany, NY 12210
518-462-2000

mental
illnesses
are
brain
disorders



NAMI

National Alliance
on Mental Illness

Finger Lakes
support education advocacy

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 TELEPHONE: D: _____ E: _____ E-mail _____
 RELATIONSHIP TO PERSON WITH MENTAL ILLNESS: _____

DUES ARE \$25.00 PER YEAR FOR INDIVIDUALS AND \$35.00 FOR FAMILIES
 MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO NAMI-FL AND MAIL TO:
 104 E. LEWIS ST.
 ITHACA, NY

607-273-2462 www.namifingerlakes.org

nami the nation's voice on mental illness

What is NAMI?

The National Alliance on Mental Illness is an organization founded by families with loved ones who suffer from mental illness. Started in 1979, NAMI has over 1200 affiliates throughout the United States, whose purpose is to provide education, support and advocacy. NAMI-Finger Lakes began in 1985 and is one of 71 affiliates in New York State.

Goals of NAMI-Finger Lakes:

- ❖ To provide a self-help group for parents, spouses, partners, children, siblings, and friends of people with mental illness
- ❖ To educate ourselves and the public about major mental illness
- ❖ To change stereotypes and overcome stigma associated with mental illness
- ❖ To support expanded research into causes and treatment of mental illness
- ❖ To advocate for high quality service delivery for people with serious mental illness

What is Mental Illness?

Mental illness is a term used to describe a group of major brain diseases causing severe disturbance in thinking, feeling, and relating. As a result, a person has a substantially diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life. Mental illness can affect persons of any age--children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Several million people in this country suffer from a serious, long term mental illness. The major mental illnesses are schizophrenia, bipolar disorder/manic depression, major depression, and anxiety disorders.

Schizophrenia is one of the most serious and disabling of the major mental illnesses. It is characterized by disconnected thought and language, poor reasoning and judgement, hallucinations, delusions, deterioration in hygiene, loss of motivation and ability to concentrate, and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions.

Bipolar Disorder/Manic-Depressive Illness, is a disorder that disturbs mood, with the person who suffers from this illness fluctuating between very high, manic moods and low, depressive moods.

Manic-depressive Illness can include characteristics such as boundless energy, enthusiasm, a need for activity, decreased need for sleep, rapid, loud and disorganized speech, delusional thinking, a rapid switch to depression, with short temper and argumentativeness.

Severe depression, like the depressive phase of bipolar disorder, can result in feelings of hopelessness, loss of interest in daily activities, loss of appetite, feelings of despondency or sadness, psychotic symptoms, and suicidal thoughts, or even action.

Anxiety disorders include panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and phobias. Panic disorder involves sudden feelings of terror that strike repeatedly and without warning. Obsessive-compulsive disorder is characterized by repeated, intrusive, and unwanted thoughts and/or rituals that seem impossible to control. All anxiety disorders involve unrealistic worry, and tremendous discomfort.

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