

# What is a Mental Illness?

Mental illnesses are behavioral problems that profoundly affect thought processes, moods, and/or the ability to relate to others. These behavioral problems can become severe enough to affect the ability to function adequately on a daily basis. The most common mental illnesses in college are *mood disorders* (including depression and bipolar disorder) *anxiety disorders* (including Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), social anxiety, phobias, and generalized anxiety), and *schizophrenia* (disturbed thoughts, hallucinations, and delusions that make it difficult to communicate thoughts and feelings). In trying to manage these disorders, some students develop other problems or control issues such as eating disorders, alcohol or other substance abuse, gambling abuse, or other addictions.

Here is a short list of symptoms to keep in mind. If you notice a cluster of these symptoms occurring in a person for a prolonged period, you may want to talk to this person and have this person inquire about receiving professional help.

Mood Disorder Symptoms	Anxiety Disorder Symptoms	Psychotic Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme highs in moods that affect one's ability to reason logically about situations (e.g., hypersexual behavior, spending sprees)</li> <li>• Unusual argumentativeness and irritability</li> <li>• Lack of interest in usual interests/hobbies</li> <li>• Isolating oneself</li> <li>• Constant negative talk and/or self deprecation</li> <li>• Sad moods that don't go away</li> <li>• Extreme lack of energy and being constantly tired</li> <li>• Unusual amount of energy-thoughts of invincibility</li> <li>• Unusual guilt and loss of self-confidence</li> <li>• Sleeping and eating problems</li> <li>• Morbid thoughts—life is better without me</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating and making decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical complaints like headaches, constant stomach problems-vomiting, diarrhea, dry mouth</li> <li>• Excessive fear and worry</li> <li>• Chest pains, heart palpitations, rapid heartbeat, flushed face</li> <li>• Hyperventilation, shortness of breath</li> <li>• Dizziness, sweating, tingling and numbness, tremors esp. in hands</li> <li>• Muscle aches and pains (head, neck, shoulders, lower back)</li> <li>• Unusual fears that make a person avoid situations that compromise their daily functioning</li> <li>• Visual signs of distress in social situations</li> <li>• Difficulty relaxing, irritability, keyed up and on the edge</li> <li>• Sleeping and eating problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noticeable depression and/or anxiety</li> <li>• Unusual irritability and/or suspiciousness</li> <li>• Emotional expression is blunted, flat, or just unusual</li> <li>• Unusual appetite changes</li> <li>• Reduced energy and motivation</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating; talk of hearing voices or having hallucinations</li> <li>• Grandiose ideas or talk about having unusual abilities</li> <li>• Odd ideas that aren't linked to hobbies/interests</li> <li>• Unusual perceptual experiences (reduced or greater sense of smell, sound, or color)</li> <li>• Isolation and withdrawal from others</li> <li>• Inability to carry out normal daily tasks (attend classes, work, socializing)</li> </ul>

## What are the Warning Signs of Mental Illness?

- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Marked personality change
- Strange or grandiose ideas.
- Excessive anxieties (nervousness that is readily apparent, even in calm situations).
- Prolonged depression and apathy.
- Marked changes in eating or sleeping patterns.
- Extreme highs and lows.
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs.
- Excessive anger, hostility, or violent behavior.
- Excessive withdrawal from others.
- Talking about being able to see or hear things that others do not experience (not drug induced).
- Poor eating habits (noticeable changes in weight loss or weight gain).



A person who is thinking or talking about suicide or homicide should seek help immediately.

On campus, use the Counseling Center: Daytime telephone number is **491-6053**. For after hours in an emergency—after 5pm and on weekends, call **491-7111**. You will get the on campus police, let them know you would like to speak to a counselor on-call.

For immediate talking help anywhere, call **1-800-273-TALK**—you will reach a person from anywhere in the country who can discuss the suicidal issue and help you find local help.

For a person who is not a CSU student and lives in Fort Collins, call *Connections* to set up an appt. with a therapist, **221-5551**.