



The Public Health Agency of Canada defines mental illnesses as alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning. They result from complex interactions of biological, psychosocial, economic and genetic factors.¹

Mental illnesses can affect individuals of any age; however, they often appear by adolescence or early adulthood.

There are many different types of mental illnesses, and they can range from single, short-lived episodes to chronic disorders. It would be impossible to cover all types in this checklist document.

MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESS



CHECKLISTS

As such, the checklists will focus on anxiety disorders, mood disorders, including major depression and bipolar disorder, substance-related disorders and psychotic disorders, with the intent to help recognition of self and others.

Each person is different and will have unique signs and symptoms, but here are some of the more common ones for each mental health problem.

ANXIETY

Anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive and persistent feelings of nervousness, anxiety and even fear which interfere with an individual's everyday life for an extended period of time.

Signs and symptoms of anxiety^{2,3}

Psychological include:

- Excessive worry
- Feeling keyed up, on edge
- Irritability, impatience
- Fear, sense of doom or imminent danger
- Difficulty relaxing
- Feeling detached from oneself
- Mind racing or mind going blank, difficulty concentrating or paying attention
- Sleeping poorly, difficulty falling asleep, vivid dreams

Physical include:

- Heart palpitations, chest pain, rapid heart rate, flushing
- Hyperventilation, shortness of breath
- Dizziness, headache, vertigo, tingling or numbness of the skin
- Dry mouth, choking, stomach pains, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Muscle ache and tension, restlessness

Behavioural include:

- Obsessive or compulsive behaviour
- Distress in social situations
- Avoidance of situations



You might be wondering how to learn more about signs and symptoms of anxiety and how to help someone with anxiety. Check out www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2018/12/how-to-help-someone-with-anxiety/.



MOOD DISORDERS

Mood disorders are characterized by the lowering or elevation of a person's mood and interfere with an individual's everyday life for an extended period of time. There are two main forms of mood disorders—depressive and bipolar.

Signs and symptoms of...

...depression²

Physical include:

- Looking sad, dejected, or anxious
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usually-enjoyed activities
- Looking unkept, change in weight or appetite
- Speaking slowly in monotones
- Slowed thinking and body movements or agitation, unable to sit still, pacing or hand-wringing, poor concentration and difficulty making decisions
- Decreased energy, tiredness and fatigue, sleep disturbances

Attitudes and words include:

- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness or hopelessness
- Sense of worthlessness, guilt, blame
- Words like "I'm a failure", "I am so alone", "There is nothing good out there", "I have let everyone down"
- Thoughts of death



The **Goldberg Depression Scale**⁴ screens for depression. It is not intended to diagnose depression. If a person rates high on this scale, a professional assessment can accurately diagnose whether or not the person has clinical depression. It also includes a scale for anxiety.

...bipolar disorder

People with bipolar disorder have extreme mood swings and experience periods of depression and mania, often with extended periods of "normal" mood in between.²

...depression in bipolar disorder²

During episodes of depression the person has some or all of the signs and symptoms listed above in depression. There may be days, weeks, or years between the manic and depressive episodes or they may occur one right after the other.

...mania in bipolar disorder^{1,2,5}

- Increased energy, talking or moving, inappropriate excitement
- Elevated or elated mood, feeling on top of the world, feelings of invincibility
- Less need for sleep
- Irritability or excessive anger

- Increased sexual thoughts and activity, sometimes resulting in promiscuity and inappropriate or unsafe behaviour, loss of self-control and impulsive or reckless behaviour
- Racing and disconnected thoughts
- Hallucinations and delusions, the person is convinced their manic beliefs are real, they do not realize they are ill and have poor judgment



You might be wondering how to learn more about manic disorder. Check out the Public Health Agency of Canada, which includes links to additional resources.
www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness/what-should-know-about-bipolar-disorder-manic-depression

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Learn more?

SUBSTANCE-RELATED DISORDERS

Using a substance does not mean that a person has a substance-related problem or disorder. Substance use is a problem when use continues despite physical, mental, social, legal and/or financial consequences and failure to meet duties at work, school or home.²

Signs and symptoms

A simple way of understanding and describing substance abuse is to use the 4C's⁶ approach:

- Craving
- Loss of control of amount or frequency of use
- Compulsion to use
- Continued substance use despite consequences such as use when it is physically hazardous



PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS

These are mental health problems that cause the person to lose touch with reality.

Signs and symptoms^{2,7}

- Depression
- Increased anxiety
- Suspiciousness, a constant feeling of being watched or followed (delusions which are a strong belief in something that isn't true)
- Blunted or flat, inappropriate emotion
- Irrational, angry or fearful responses to friends and family (e.g.: suddenly laughing when someone tells a sad story)

- Feeling "different" or feeling like your thoughts have sped up or slowed down
- Hallucinations, sensing things that aren't really there. Hallucinations can occur with any of the five senses (hearing, sight, taste, touch, smell). The most common hallucination is hearing another voice talking that others can't hear.
- Jumbled and illogical speech
- Slow, awkward, rigid or very fast movements



Are you interested in learning more about mental health and how to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or is in a mental health crisis?

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a two-day course that teaches people how to recognize the symptoms of mental health problems, provide initial help, and guide a person towards appropriate professional help.

Reach out to your local MHFA chapter to register for an open enrollment course or gather together a minimum of 15 people and invite a MHFA trainer to teach the course.

www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca



The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) is a 10-item screening tool developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to assess alcohol consumption, drinking behaviours, and alcohol-related problems. Both a clinician-administered version (page 1) and a self-report version of the AUDIT (page 2) are provided. Find it here www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/files/AUDIT.pdf.

You might be wondering how to learn more about substance abuse, addiction, and dependency including harm reduction. Check this out ontario.cmha.ca/addiction-and-substance-use-and-addiction/.



REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

1. Public Health Agency of Canada Mental Disorders www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness
2. Mental Health First Aid Canada Participant Workbook, 2011, www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca
3. Mental Health First Aid USA Signs and symptoms of anxiety and how to help someone with anxiety www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2018/12/how-to-help-someone-with-anxiety/
4. Goldberg, D., et al. "Detecting anxiety and depression in general medical settings." *Bmj* 297:6653 (1988): 897-899.
5. Government of Canada. The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada. Ottawa (Ontario); Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada; 2006. 188 p. Cat. No. HP5-19/2006E. ISBN: 0-662-43887-6. www.bmj.com/content/bmj/297/6653/897.full.pdf
6. Ontario Mental Health Association signs and symptoms of substance abuse and addiction ontario.cmha.ca/addiction-and-substance-use-and-addiction/
7. B.C. Mental Health Association signs and symptoms of psychosis www.cmha.bc.ca/documents/psychosis-2/
8. Canadian Mental Health Agency has resources for mental health www.cmha.ca/

This checklist was written by Dr. Kathy Keil. Dr. Keil studied cognitive and neuropsychology in her undergraduate and graduate psychology degrees prior to attending veterinary school. She is not a licenced psychologist. She has training in Mental Health First Aid, safeTALK suicide awareness, ASIST suicide intervention and is licenced to teach safeTALK. She regularly teaches suicide awareness and basic intervention skills to veterinary professionals and ways for them to take care of their own mental well-being. She is a member of the ABVMA Member Wellness Committee and a technical services veterinarian with Merck Animal Health. She is the leading force behind the Merck-CVMA "It's Time to Talk about Mental Health in Vet Med" Awareness Campaign.



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