



Mental Health Guide



Table of Contents



Introduction	1
Mental Health & How to Talk About It	2-3
Signs & Symptoms	4
Suicide & Suicide Prevention	5
Seeking Help	
Why You Should	6
Finding Care	7
What to Expect	8
Coping Mechanisms	9
Substance Abuse	10
Lifestyle	11
Medication	12
Apps & Resources	13-16

Introduction



Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences how we think, feel, and act in our daily lives—and impacts everything from our relationships and finances to our physical health. Mental illnesses are conditions that affect these areas and may be short-term or long-lasting.

Around 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in any given year. There are many different reasons why someone might develop a mental illness, including a history of trauma, biological factors, experience of physical illness, or substance use. Each reason is equally valid, and every person is deserving of treatment. Misunderstandings about mental illness often lead people to believe that they are alone, should be ashamed for having a mental illness, or are weak for needing support. This is called stigma, and it can prevent people from getting the help they need.

Seeking therapy, medication, or other treatments for your mental health is a sign of strength and bravery, not weakness. Exploring options for treatment and talking about mental health are powerful ways to fight stigma and work towards healing.

This guide will provide you with information and resources surrounding mental health that can help you identify mental illness and understand options for improving mental well-being.

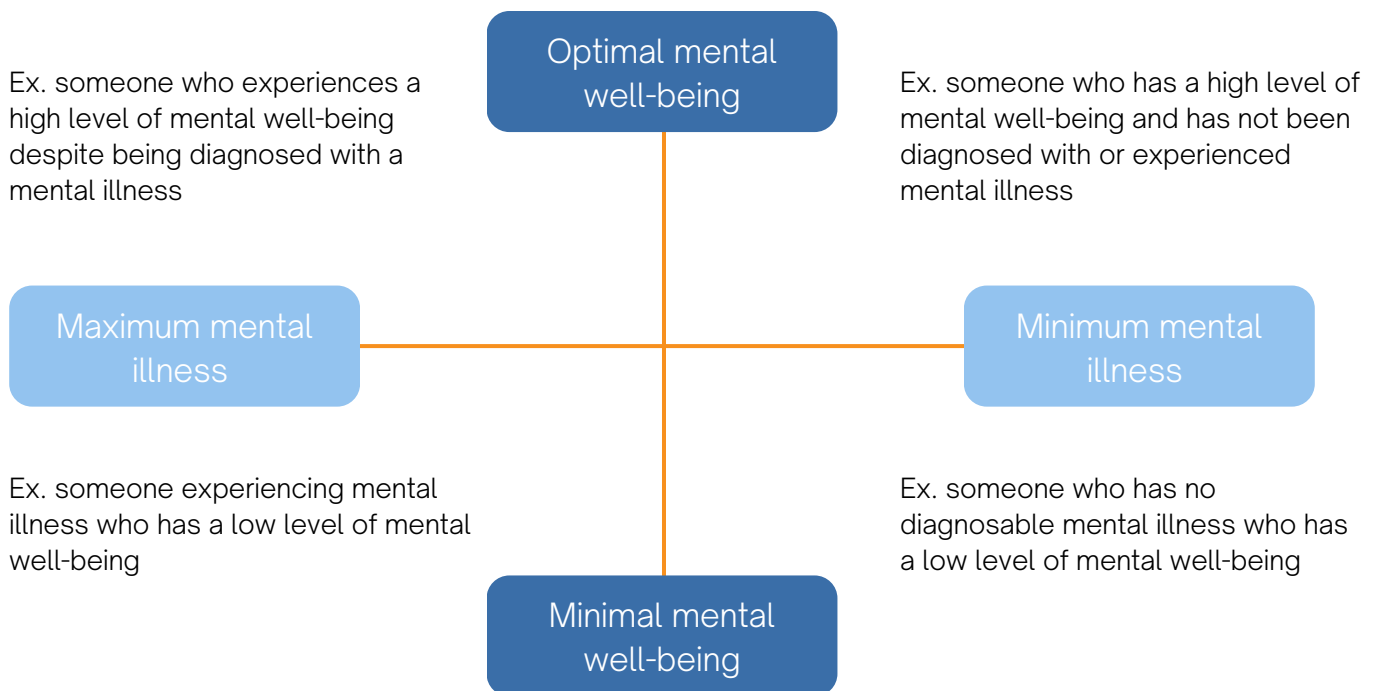
This guide provides mental health information and is only intended to assist individuals in their personal mental health journey. Nothing contained in this guide is medical advice or diagnosis nor should any information in this guide be construed as such.

You are urged and advised to seek the advice of a physician or licensed mental health provider regarding mental health care.

Mental Health & How to Talk About It



Mental health and illness make up a complex spectrum. Individuals who have a diagnosed mental illness may experience periods of happiness and heightened well-being, and people who are in a state of optimal well-being can experience periods of sadness or stress. The below model illustrates this idea about mental health:



Tips for talking about your mental health with a friend or loved one:

- Start by asking if it's a good time to talk - this may be over text, in person, or on a phone call. If they agree, avoid scheduling the conversation far in advance to reduce worry and anticipation on both ends.
- Use "I" statements - Focus the conversation on how you are feeling and thinking to prevent the listener from feeling a misdirected sense of blame or responsibility for your mental health.
- Find information online about mental health that might help you explain what you're feeling.
- Prepare for the possibility that the listener may not understand or react how you hoped. Don't let this discourage you from seeking future support from others.
- Even though the conversation might feel awkward, you'll likely feel relieved after and more confident in seeking help from a professional.

Tips for supporting a friend or loved one with their mental health:

- **Start by asking if it's a good time to talk** - if they agree, avoid scheduling the conversation far in advance to reduce worry and anticipation on both ends.
- **Create a non-judgmental environment with no distractions.**
- **Ask open-ended questions** - avoid making assumptions or accusations about the state of their mental health. Instead, let them answer by asking "How have you been doing recently?" or other questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
- **Be an active listener** - let them finish their thoughts before you respond.
- **Show that you're listening by reflecting back what you heard.**
 - Example: if they say "I've been feeling really low and I'm not sure what's wrong" you could say, "It sounds like you've not been feeling like yourself lately."
- **Avoid trying to diagnose what they're going through** - instead offer support in helping them connect with a professional.
- **Know your limits** - if you believe they are in immediate danger, take action to make sure they are safe. If they aren't in danger, set healthy boundaries to protect your own mental health. You are there to support them - you are not their therapist.

Note: Mental illness does not define who someone is, just as a tumor doesn't define someone who has cancer. Even so, it can still feel incredibly difficult. Sometimes the most helpful thing you can say is: *"I'm sorry you're going through this. That sounds really hard."*



Signs & Symptoms

Recognizing the signs of mental health challenges in yourself or others is an important first step in seeking support. Mental health conditions can show up in emotional, physical, and behavioral ways.

Ongoing symptoms that affect your daily functioning may be a sign that additional support is needed.

Emotional & Thought-Related Signs

- Feeling excessively sad or down
- Confused thinking or difficulty concentrating
- Excessive fears, worries, or feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope with daily stress
- Trouble understanding and relating to situations and people
- Detachment from reality, paranoia, or hallucinations
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence
- Suicidal thinking

Physical & Behavioral Symptoms

- Withdrawal from friends, family, or activities
- Significant fatigue, low energy or sleep disturbances
- Changes in eating habits
- Problems with alcohol or drug use
- Multiple physical symptoms without a clear cause (e.g., headaches, stomach aches, ongoing pains)
- Changes in sex drive

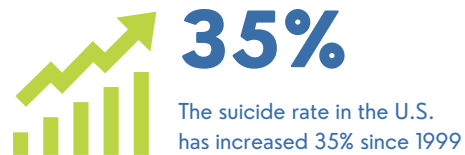
Recognizing Mental Illness in Children

Children can experience mental health conditions, but they may not have the tools to talk effectively about their thoughts or emotions. For this reason, it's important to recognize the following behavioral signs:

- Disrupted ability to participate in play, school, or typical age-appropriate social situations
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for instance fighting to avoid bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums
- Racing heartbeat, headaches or belly aches

Suicide & Suicide Prevention

Experiencing thoughts about suicide can be scary, but it's important to remember that you're not alone, and there are resources for support. It's crucial to take suicidal thoughts seriously in order to work towards a path of healing.



Risk factors for suicidality may include:

- Mental illness
- Alcohol and other drug use
- History of trauma or abuse
- Major physical illness
- Family history of suicide
- Easy access to lethal means
- Lack of social support
- Exposure to others who have died by suicide

Warning signs of suicide may include:

- Talking/thinking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to end one's life (e.g. searching online)
- Talking about/feeling hopeless, trapped, or like a burden
- Increase alcohol and/or other drug use
- Withdrawing or isolating oneself
- Extreme mood swings
- Sleeping too little or too much

If you or a friend are having thoughts about suicide, support is available:



Reach out to a crisis support service

- Call or text **988** to reach the **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** (available 24/7, free, and confidential)
- Chat via web: **988lifeline.org**
- Text **HELLO** to **741741** to connect with **Crisis Text Line**



Talk to a trusted professional

Make an appointment with a doctor, therapist, or counselor to discuss how you're feeling.



Connect with someone you trust

Call or text a friend, family member, or someone you feel safe talking to.

Remember:

Suicidal thoughts are a sign of distress—not a personal failure. Support and treatment can help, and you don't have to navigate this alone.

Seeking Help: Why You Should



Treatment for mental illness may include a variety of types of therapy, medication, support groups, and/or lifestyle changes. Choosing your path to treatment is personal, and it might take time to feel the positive changes of one or more of these methods combined.

Research shows that **75% of individuals who go to therapy show some benefit or improvement to their mental health.** Depending on the person, it's possible to feel these positive impacts after anywhere from a few therapy sessions to a year or two of recurring sessions. For some people, the benefits of combining both therapy and medication may be greater than the impacts of either on their own. Generally, if you can function well on a daily basis, you may benefit just from therapy alone.

Potential benefits of seeking treatment for mental health include:

- Overcoming past trauma
- Improving your relationships with others and yourself
- Finding positive coping mechanisms that work for you
- Reduced depression, anxiety, or compulsive behaviors
- Improved self esteem
- Improved communication skills

Getting help does not have to mean being in crisis. Support can also help with stress, burnout, grief, or feeling stuck. Ask yourself the questions below...

What would you like to change about how you're feeling lately? _____

Have you noticed that it's more difficult to do the things you once did? _____

How important is it to you to feel better? What benefits might it bring? _____

How do you think change might occur? _____

Why now? _____

Seeking Help: Finding Care



Finding a mental health care provider can often feel stressful or intimidating, but it doesn't need to be. There are a number of ways to connect with a psychiatrist and/or licensed mental health counselor; read below to find what may work best for you.

EAP: Employee Assistance Program

Check with your company's HR department to find out if there is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available to you. EAPs often offer free and confidential short-term counseling or referrals to mental health care providers, are available 24/7, and are usually available to your household members as well. If you're looking to connect with a mental health care provider quickly or temporarily, this may be a good place to start.

Pros: receive immediate assistance, no cost

Cons: not meant for long-term care, can't "shop around" for a provider

Insurance Carrier

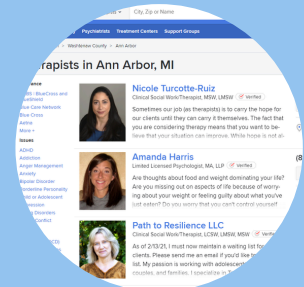
Depending on your insurance provider, they may offer a search tool for finding in-network mental health care providers including psychiatrists and licensed counselors.

Pros: guaranteed in-network providers, free

Cons: provider pool may be limited, covered sessions may be limited

Psychology Today

Psychology Today offers an online search tool to find verified and licensed therapists, teletherapy providers, psychiatrists, treatment centers, and support groups in your area. Users are able to filter based on insurance, issues, types of therapy or care provided, and more. This is a helpful tool for finding a long-term mental health care provider that works for you.



Pros: vast pool of providers, ability to filter & verify, free to use

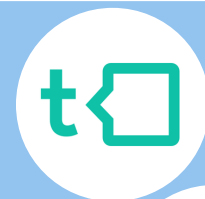
Cons: may take several sessions to find the right fit

Independent Providers

If you're having trouble finding a provider in-network or are interested in teletherapy that's more accommodating to your schedule, there are online therapy companies who can connect you with a mental health care provider. For more information, see page 16.

Pros: flexible scheduling, accessible anywhere, 24/7 access to care

Cons: out-of-pocket cost (possible HSA), virtual therapy and telehealth only



Seeking Help: What to Expect

There are varying approaches to mental health treatment depending on different diagnoses, treatment models, behaviors, etc. Outside of psychiatric care, most prevalent and adaptable is mental health counseling, or therapy.

Starting therapy can feel intimidating or overwhelming, especially when you don't know what to expect. Understanding how the process works can help alleviate some of those concerns.

Finding the Right Fit

It is perfectly normal, and encouraged, to interview or meet with more than one therapist before deciding who feels like the best fit for you. You do not have to stay with the first therapist you try if the connection or approach does not feel right.

Questions to consider asking a therapist:

- What's your experience? How long have you been practicing?
- What type or style of therapy do you practice? Do you think it will be a good fit for what I'm dealing with?
- Is your approach more directive or more guiding?
- What are your strengths and limitations as a counselor?
- How do you create counseling goals and what does success in our sessions look like to you?
- How do I prepare for my first session?

Questions to ask yourself:

- What brought me to therapy?
- What do I hope to gain or improve?
- What would progress look like for me?
- What am I willing to try or change?

A Helpful Reminder

It's completely normal for the first session, or even the first few, to feel a little uncomfortable. Over time, many people begin to feel more at ease and supported.

What Happens During Therapy

Therapy provides a safe, confidential space to talk openly about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is a chance to problem-solve current situations in your life and your feelings around them with someone who is trained in different interpersonal and psychological methods.

Your therapist's role is to listen, guide, and support you - not judge or criticize you.

Depending on your needs and preferences, sessions may include:

- Talking through current challenges
- Learning coping strategies
- Practicing techniques such as meditation, breathing exercises, visualization, or role-playing exercises.
- Setting goals and reflecting on progress

You may also be given simple activities to try between sessions, such as journaling or practicing new skills.



Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are how we respond to stress, whether it be internal or external, day-to-day or stemming from a traumatic experience. Coping mechanisms can often improve mental health and emotional well-being; however, some maladaptive coping mechanisms can have the opposite effect.

Maladaptive (-)

Projection

Putting our own negative or frightening emotions onto another person ("I'm not upset, you are!") in order to ignore the problem and protect ourselves.

Dissociation

Removing yourself from traumatic or frightening thoughts, emotions, memories, or surroundings to "escape" overwhelming feelings.

Self-Medication

Offering feelings of acceptance or confidence, substances like drugs, alcohol, or food can often offer temporary relief from negative or frightening emotions but ultimately have a negative effect on mental and physical health.

Denial/Repression

Selectively denying or ignoring bad, or seemingly unbearable, news helps create a false sense of security. For example, it could look like denying a cancer diagnosis or being unwilling to admit addiction.

Self-Harm

Injuring yourself physically as a means of dealing with trauma, stress, or upsetting emotions.

Adaptive (+)

Social Support

Asking for help or for emotional support from family members, friends, and intentional support group, or a professional can be an effective way to deal with stress and/or negative emotions.

Positive Reframing & Humor

Pointing out the amusing aspects of a problem or identifying the upside to a negative situation is a way to relieve stress. It can also help adjust your mindset to focus on a solution or express gratitude.

Physical Recreation & Relaxation

Regular exercise, such as running, walking, yoga, or team sports, is a healthy way to handle stress and process negative emotions. Additionally, relaxation and calming techniques can help to manage stress and improve overall coping.

Acceptance

By accepting the reality of past trauma or current negative situations and emotions, you can begin to acknowledge your feelings, process them, and work through the discomfort.



MoodMission: Based in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), this app prompts quick and achievable mental health strategies to reduce stress and help positively cope with negative emotions.

Substance Abuse & Mental Health

The most common maladaptive coping mechanism is substance use, with roughly **50% of those with severe mental health disorders being affected by substance abuse.**

Of those with a diagnosis of mental illness, **29%** abuse alcohol or drugs.

37% of alcohol abusers and **53%** of drug abusers also have at least one serious mental illness.

Signs and symptoms of substance use include, but are not limited to:

- Feeling that you have to use the substance regularly
- Having intense urges for the substance that block out any other thoughts
- Spending money on the substance, even though you can't afford it
- Not meeting obligations and work responsibilities, or cutting back on social or recreational activities because of drug use
- Continuing to use the substance, even though you know it's causing problems in your life or causing you physical or psychological harm

Mental health disorders and substance use disorders are often co-morbid:

- Alcohol and/or drugs are often used to self-medicate the symptoms of mental health disorders; however, these substances can cause side effects and ultimately worsen the symptoms they are being used to alleviate.
- Not only can alcohol and drugs worsen symptoms, they can also trigger new symptoms and interact with medications such as anti-depressants and mood stabilizers, which can be dangerous and delay recovery.
- Admitting and addressing substance abuse can be particularly difficult due to both the physical addiction and stigmatization, but is essential when caring for your mental health.
- Treatment for a mental health disorder may include medication, individual or group counseling, self-help measures, lifestyle changes, and peer support and can be accomplished concurrently with treatment for substance abuse.



Sober Grid: This app offers 24/7 peer support for recovery and sobriety, allows users to keep track of their sobriety time, acknowledge achievements, earn badges, and complete check-ins and pledges

For treatment referral and information, call the SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Lifestyle & Mental Health

Mental health is a part of overall health. Not only can maintaining a healthy lifestyle help prevent the onset of mental health conditions, it can also help prevent the worsening of symptoms and act as a powerful coping mechanism and protective factor. Read below about the components of a healthy lifestyle and how they can affect mental health.

Physical Activity

Exercise has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression while improving mood, confidence, and cognitive function. Even 20 minutes of physical activity a day, whether it be walking, dancing, biking, or yoga, can have a positive impact on your mental health.

Try this: Start with a 10-20 minute walk or movement you enjoy.

Healthy Diet

Our diet can and does affect our brain. A healthy diet full of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats can help reduce symptoms of some mental health disorders including anxiety and depression. Diets high in saturated fats and sugars have been shown to be linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression. Eating a healthy diet also reduces your risk for chronic health conditions, further reducing your risk for co-morbid mental health conditions.

Try this: Add one fruit or vegetable to your meals each day or focus on staying hydrated.

Social Support

While many parts of health are personal and internal, having social support systems is an important part of an overall healthy lifestyle. Struggling with mental health can often feel overwhelming and isolating, so being able to talk to and rely on support is essential whether it be family, friends, support groups, or a mentor.

Try this: Reach out to one person this week - text, call, or plan time to connect.

Sleep Well

Sleep problems can often exacerbate existing symptoms of mental health conditions. For example, night-time anxiety may lead to reduced rest and increased anxiety during the day, creating a cycle that can be emotionally challenging to break. Having a sleep schedule, making sure to un-plug and relax, and creating a restful environment can help you sleep better.

Try this: Go to bed at the same time each night and limit screens before bed.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, can help reduce stress and chronic pain, lower blood pressure, and improve sleep. Not only can mindfulness practices improve overall health, they can also help train your brain over time to have better control over processing pain and emotions—two factors linked closely with mental health.

Try this: Take 2-5 minutes to focus on your breathing or try a short guided meditation.



Medication

Medication can be an important and effective part of mental health care. For some people, it is used short-term; for others, it may be part of a longer-term treatment plan.

Using medication to support your mental health is not a weakness - it is one of many tools available to help you feel better, and it may take time to find what works best.

Medication is often most effective when combined with therapy, lifestyle changes, and ongoing support.

Getting Prescribed

Medications for mental health conditions are prescribed by a licensed prescribing clinician, such as a physician or psychiatrist. Your provider will consider your symptoms, medical history, and lifestyle to determine the best option for you. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

It may take time - and sometimes trying different options - to find what works best for you. This is perfectly normal and a common part of the process.

Types of Medications

Antidepressants

Commonly used to treat depression, anxiety, OCD, PTSD, and other conditions. These work by helping balance brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) that affect mood and emotions. These medications can often take several weeks to reach full effect, so consistency is important

Anti-anxiety Medications

Some medications help reduce anxiety quickly, while others work over time. Certain medications (such as benzodiazepines) act on the nervous system to create a calming effect but are typically intended for short-term use due to the risk of dependence.

Other Medications

Depending on your needs, your provider may recommend mood stabilizers, antipsychotics, or beta-blockers.

What to Expect

- Some medications take several weeks to show full effects
- Side effects are possible and vary by individual
- Adjustments are common and part of the process
- Regular communication with your provider is important

Safety & Communication

Always talk with your provider before starting, stopping, or changing any medication. This includes over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and supplements. Some medications can have serious interactions. For example, combining certain anti-anxiety medications with alcohol can be dangerous. If you have concerns about side effects or how you're feeling, reach out to your provider—adjustments can often be made.

Diagnosis-Specific Mental Health Apps

The following apps are recommended for individuals who have received a diagnosis from a licensed medical provider. These tools are not a substitute for treatment (such as therapy or medication), but can help support symptom management, track progress, create goals, and enhance communication with a provider.



MindShift CBT:

A free evidence-based app designed to help manage anxiety using scientifically proven strategies based on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). It includes guided tools for working through worry, panic, and avoidance, helping users respond to anxiety in the moment rather than only tracking it afterward. Users may share their progress and data with their providers

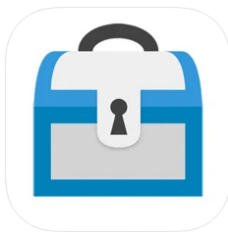
For: Anxiety



What's Up?:

Uses CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to help users manage thoughts, track habits, and build coping strategies. The app also includes peer forums, making it useful for those who benefit from both structured tools and shared experiences.

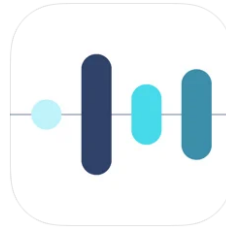
For: Depression, Anxiety



MoodTools:

Provides research-supported tools to help improve mood and manage symptoms of depression. Features include a thought diary, activity suggestions, guided videos (including meditations and educational talks), and the ability to track symptom severity over time using the PHQ-9 depression questionnaire. Users can also create a personalized suicide safety plan.

For: Depression



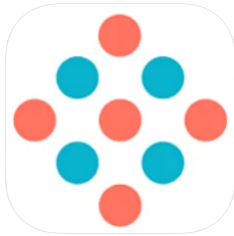
eMoods Bipolar Mood Tracker:

A structured tracking app that allows individuals to monitor mood, sleep, and medication over time. It allows users to track and journal daily experiences, with data displayed in clear charts and reports that can be shared with a healthcare provider to help identify patterns and support treatment plans.

For: Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety, Depression

Diagnosis-Specific Mental Health Apps

Cont.



NOCD: Effective Care for OCD:

A specialized app for OCD treatment that provides access to licensed therapists and therapeutic tools based on exposure and response prevention (ERP), the gold standard for OCD care. The app supports structured treatment plans and includes evidence-based tools, along with access to a virtual community for peer support and shared experiences.

For: OCD



PTSD Coach:

Developed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, this app provides education about PTSD along with self-assessment tools, coping strategies, and resources for support. While originally designed for military populations, it can be used by anyone experiencing PTSD and may be used independently or alongside professional care.

For: PTSD



UCSF PRIME:

Created by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, this evidence-based app offers social connection with peers, goal setting to support well-being, and access to mental health coaches who help users build skills and improve daily functioning.

Interested users must email drivelab@ucsf.edu to discuss eligibility.

For: Schizophrenia



Recovery Record:

Designed to support eating disorder recovery using evidence-based strategies. Users can log meals, emotions, and behaviors, track patterns, and share progress with a healthcare provider. The app also offers coping tools, meal reminders, and personalized insights to support a healthier relationship with food.

For: Disordered Eating, Eating Disorders (including OSFED)

Wellness Apps

The following apps are recommended as supplements to mental health care and focus on building and maintaining lifestyle habits that support lower stress and improved mood. These apps include tools for meditation, mindfulness, affirmations, journaling, mood tracking, and more.



Headspace:

Offers a wide variety of guided meditations for stress, anxiety, depression, sleep, and overall mind-body health. In addition to meditation and mindfulness skills, the app includes sleep sounds, breathing techniques, and mindful at-home fitness and cardio workouts led by Olympic trainers. While most content requires a subscription, a selection of resources are available for free.



Happify:

Based in positive psychology, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), Happify uses science-based activities and games to help overcome negative thoughts, reduce stress, and build resilience. Individuals can choose from a variety of “tracks,” or structured programs, and monitor their progress over time.



Insight Timer:

Provides a large library of guided meditations, music, and talks focused on stress, sleep, and overall well-being. Individuals can participate in live sessions, join a global community, and explore content from a wide range of teachers and perspectives, making it a flexible option for different preferences and experience levels.



I am - Daily Affirmations:

A simple app that delivers daily positive affirmations to support mindset, confidence, and focus. Individuals can customize affirmation categories, set daily intentions, and choose how often reminders are delivered throughout the day, giving them the power to be their own cheerleader.

Teletherapy Apps

If you prefer a virtual method of attending therapy, check out the apps below. Services through these apps may not be covered by insurance and may require out-of-pocket costs. Check with your insurance, EAP, or wellness program to see what virtual therapy and/or telehealth options are available to you.



Talkspace Therapy & Counseling:

Through Talkspace, individuals can match with a licensed mental health provider and communicate via text, video, or audio. The platform offers live sessions, goal and symptom tracking, and tools to help build healthy habits through mindfulness and guided exercises.



BetterHelp - Online Counseling:

BetterHelp allows individuals to connect with licensed therapists across a wide range of specialties, including anxiety, depression, family, and couples therapy. The platform offers flexible communication options, including messaging, video, and phone sessions, along with access to educational group webinars.

App availability, features, and pricing may change over time. Review privacy policies before use.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Get Help

Using the 988 Lifeline is free. When you call, text, or chat the 988 Lifeline, your conversation is confidential. The 988 Lifeline provides you judgment-free care. Talking with someone can help save your life.

By reading this guide, you've taken the time to understand more about mental health conditions and their treatment. Dealing with mental health conditions is a journey, and we hope that some of the provided resources in this document can help support you along the way.

If you have any questions, you can reach out to the Kapnick Strive team at strive@kapnick.com or 877.233.2296.