



Mental Health Symptoms

How do mental health symptoms impact your health?

Mental health symptoms can affect your general wellness, your ability to function in everyday life, and relationships with others.

Mental health symptoms can cause new problems to develop and/or existing problems to get worse. These symptoms might include:

- Being more irritable (e.g., feeling easily angered, or “touchy”)
- Having more anxiety (e.g., feeling worried or stressed, having increased heart rate)
- Having mood swings (e.g., having a sudden, usually unpleasant change in your mood)
- Depressed mood (e.g., feeling sad or tearful, feeling “down”)
- Apathy (e.g., not caring about things you would usually care about or not having any interest in things you would usually be interested in)

What causes mental health symptoms after a concussion?

Mental health symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, are common after a concussion. It is hard to know the cause of a mental health symptom after a concussion. It can be due to the trauma that caused the injury and/or the difficulties that result from the injury.

Concussion symptoms can be related to each other. Sometimes one symptom can also cause other symptoms to be present. For example, if a person is having sleep problems it can cause them to feel depressed and have mood swings. Identifying and treating the sleep problem is likely to help with the depression and mood symptoms.

Patient Tips:

Mental health symptoms might not be there at the start of your recovery. They might only emerge over time or in response to other symptoms.

Talk to your primary healthcare provider if you are feeling *depressed*, *anxious*, or if you are having *sleep problems*. Treating these problems early will help prevent them from getting worse and will help with your recovery from concussion.

Also, let your primary healthcare provider know if you have any mental health diagnoses or symptoms that existed before your concussion.

How are mental health disorders diagnosed?

Your primary care provider will assess you for different mental health disorders including:

- Depressive disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Behavior changes (such as apathy, mood swings, impulsivity, aggression, irritability)
- Adjustment disorders
- Substance use disorders

It can be helpful to keep a journal or log of your mental health symptoms. You might want to write down what you are feeling and what you think might have caused these feelings to come up.

How are mental health symptoms and disorders treated?

If you have a mental health disorder or symptoms, your primary healthcare provider will choose a treatment based on different factors: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), can help you learn to manage negative emotions and build your ability to cope with difficult thoughts and situations.

If your mental health symptoms are more serious or if they persist, your primary healthcare provider may prescribe medications. You will likely start at a low dose and increase the dose gradually if necessary. It is important to see your primary healthcare provider regularly to make sure you are on the right medication at the right dose, to check for side effects, and to ensure your symptoms are not getting worse.

Speak with your primary healthcare provider if you want to stop taking your medication; they will have to help you go off slowly so that your symptoms do not return.

You may be referred to a mental health specialist (e.g a psychiatrist or psychologist) if:

- Your symptoms are complex and/or severe
- Treatment is not helping
- You are not able to take the usual medication for the symptoms you are having

Your primary healthcare provider will continue to help you with your mental health symptoms and other medical issues while you wait to see a mental health specialist. They can also help you work towards returning to your usual activities.

Additional resources

Below is a list of resources you may find helpful to learn more about mental health symptoms as well as tools that may help you with your recovery process.

Caring for Yourself After Concussion: Emotional Changes (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la9KdzztVDY&list=PLvD7HhN5mi-ML63F7N0F6ojIyiIrlUJmw&index=8>

Caring for Yourself After Concussion: Mindfulness (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnGDM2CE8Co&list=PLvD7HhN5mi-ML63F7N0F6ojIyiIrlUJmw&index=6>

Becoming a Self Manager: Challenging Your Thoughts (webpage)

<https://concussion.vch.ca/challenging-your-thoughts>

It can be hard to reach out for support for mental health symptoms, but getting treatment for the symptoms that you have is important for your recovery.