



## The Complete Guide to Mental Health Care for Men

Adapted from Adam England

**Mental health conditions don't discriminate. People of all genders can experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions. But they may look different in men.**

Gender stereotypes and stigma can also make it harder for both men and their healthcare professionals to recognize when they might need mental health support.

Here's the lowdown on all things related to men's mental health, from identifying symptoms to finding the right kind of therapy.

### Types of mental health conditions

Men can experience a wide range of mental health conditions, but some common ones include:

- Depression
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Social anxiety disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Schizophrenia

### Are men less likely to experience mental health conditions?

There's a common assumption that women are more likely to have mental health conditions than men, especially when it comes to depression. But that doesn't mean men aren't affected.

In fact, in 2019, men in the United States died by suicide at a rate 3.7 times greater than that of women.

Experts are increasingly acknowledging the complex factors at play when it comes to differences in how men and women experience mental health issues.

While biological factors, like hormone differences, can certainly play a role, they don't tell the whole story. Internalized gender stereotypes, coping strategies, and clinical bias, among other things, may also impact assumptions about who experiences mental health conditions — not to mention *how* they experience them, which we'll get into in a moment.

### Men's mental health symptoms to watch for

Men and women can sometimes experience the same mental health condition in different ways due to a mix of biological and social factors.

Mental health symptoms in men might include:

- Anger and aggressiveness
- Irritability
- Frustration
- Substance misuse
- Trouble concentrating
- Persistent feelings of worry
- Engagement in high-risk activities
- Unusual behavior that concerns others or gets in the way of daily life
- Thoughts of suicide

Some mental health conditions, including anxiety and depression, can also have physical symptoms that people might ignore.

- Changes in appetite and energy
- New aches and pains

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- Digestive issues
- Trouble sleeping
- Sleeping more than usual

Often, friends and family may be the first ones to notice the symptoms, as it can be difficult to recognize them when you're experiencing them.

### Why men are hesitant to reach out

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, men are less likely to have received mental health treatment than women in the past year.

This doesn't mean men don't need or benefit from treatment.

Rather, "men can find it more difficult being open about their mental health and seeking support because it's likely to go against the kinds of messages they received growing up," explains Dr. Elena Touroni, a consultant psychologist and co-founder of The Chelsea Psychology Clinic.

She goes on to note that many cultures have strong cultural stereotypes around how men should behave, especially around managing their emotions and appearing "strong."

Plus, men who don't (or feel that they can't) speak openly about their feelings might have a harder time recognizing the symptoms of mental health conditions in themselves.

### Getting help with your mental health

If you're thinking about reaching out for help but aren't sure where to start, you have a few options.

- **Talk with your doctor:** If you already regularly see a healthcare professional, they can be a good starting point. Depending on their background, they'll likely refer you to someone who specializes in mental health, like a psychiatrist or psychologist.
- **Call the EAP:** The EAP is here to assist in connecting you with a therapist that fits your needs. Give them some basic background on what you'd like to address, as well as anything you're looking for in a therapist. Do you want someone who's available for night or weekend appointments? What about text support in between sessions? Are you interested in trying teletherapy, or would you prefer in-person sessions? If you have health insurance, this is a

good time to ask about that, too. Therapy isn't always covered, but some therapists will provide documentation you can submit to your insurance provider for reimbursement.

- **Search online:** You can also search through directories online. Directories are especially helpful if you're looking for a particular type of therapy or prefer a male therapist, because the tools allow you to filter your search. A few databases to consider:
  - American Psychiatric Association
  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
  - Medicare.gov's healthcare provider tool (to find local professionals who accept Medicare)
  - Anxiety and Depression Association of America

### During the appointment

Your therapist will likely spend the first session or two getting to know you. This is also an opportunity for you to get to know their approach, so don't hesitate to ask any questions around what you can expect from future sessions.

It's important you feel comfortable talking with the expert you choose. If you feel like you aren't "clicking" with your therapist after a few sessions, you can always explore other options. Plenty of people have to see a few therapists before they find someone who's a good fit.

Depending on your symptoms, your therapist might refer you to a psychiatrist to explore medication, like antidepressants for example.

### Coping with mental health symptoms

Everyone can benefit from self-care, including men. While working with a mental health professional can be a big help, there are plenty of things you can do to support yourself between sessions.

Touroni highlights diet, sleep, and exercise as factors, but explains that "we also need to make sure we're looking after our emotional well-being."

And sometimes, that means being "able to acknowledge and stay with feelings — especially the uncomfortable ones — instead of pushing them away or denying them."

Sitting with uncomfortable feelings is easier said than done, and that can make it easy to fall into unhelpful

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coping mechanisms, like substance use or ignoring emotions.

While both of these might offer some short-term benefits, they won't offer long-lasting relief. In some cases, they might even create long-term issues.

The next time you find yourself experiencing an uncomfortable feeling or emotion, try:

- Doing a quick body scan meditation
- Writing out what you're feeling
- Practicing some simple breathing techniques

As you navigate different ways of managing your emotions, be gentle with yourself. If you don't reach for the "perfect" coping mechanisms on a bad day, for example, don't beat yourself up. There will always be another opportunity to practice new strategies.

### Opening up to friends

Talking about what you're going through with a friend can also be a big help, but that may be difficult if your friends are also men who might have a hard time opening up. But starting that conversation might end up being beneficial for both of you.

Mark Meier, the executive director of the Face It Foundation, says it's important for men to "learn to understand the nuances of emotion" and recognize that negative emotions are "normal and recurring emotions throughout life."

He recommends "finding someone that you can speak openly with about your personal challenges and open yourself up to growing more in-depth relationships with others."

Your therapist can certainly be that person, but you might also find it helpful to open up to a peer.

You can try starting the conversation with something like, "I've been going through a lot. Do you have time to catch up later this week?"

If you feel up for it, you can also make yourself available to a friend in need with a simple, "I noticed you've seemed kind of down lately. Just want you to know I'm always available to talk if you need it."

### The bottom line

Mental health can be hard to think about. And identifying that you're finding it difficult or that you might need help isn't always easy — particularly for men.

However, it's best to speak out. Whether you open up to a friend or family member or consult your doctor, there's help out there, and ways to help manage your mental health yourself, too.

### References:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mens-health/mental-health-care-for-men#takeaway>