

GET RID OF THE STIGMA

Keep in Mind:

Most people try to keep physically healthy by eating the right foods, exercising, and getting enough sleep. But not too many of us think about our mental health, which is just as important.

Mental health is all about how we think, feel, and act, and how we cope with the ups and downs in our lives. It's about how we feel about ourselves and how we deal with the negative things that happen. It's also about our self-esteem and confidence and how stress affects us. Just as our bodies can get sick, our minds can become ill, too.

Mental illness is the wide range of conditions that change the way we feel, think, and act. It can take many forms, including anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and mood disorders, such as depression. The good news is that these health issues can be treated. A person who has periods of mental illness can still be mentally healthy otherwise.

We are all in this together.

Three in five youths diagnosed with mental illness say they feel stigmatized. Why is it okay to say we have the flu, yet not okay to say we are depressed? It may be because we don't know a lot about mental illness. This lack of understanding results in a stigma associated with having poor mental health. Fortunately, that attitude is slowly shifting, but more work needs to be done.

As you read this book, think about:

- what you can do to maintain your mental health
- how you can help someone who is struggling with mental health challenges
- how we can reduce the stigma of mental illness

stigmatized: *disgraced or unworthy*

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF IGNORING MENTAL ILLNESS?

STEP 1

THE ISSUE

WHEN SOME PEOPLE THINK ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS, THEY MAY THINK OF A PERSON LOCKED UP IN AN INSTITUTION.

Others might think of a dangerous criminal who commits violent crimes. Still others might think of a movie character with several different, yet entertaining, personalities.

The truth is very different from the above examples. However, because of the myths, fears, and stereotypes surrounding mental illness, many people who need help will keep silent. They may be afraid that the stigma of being mentally ill will lead to discrimination from others. This only worsens the problem, and can even result in physical illness.

In this section, we explore some of the causes of and treatments for poor mental health. As well, we will think about how to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues.

stereotypes: *oversimplified ideas about a person*

discrimination: *unfair treatment*

THE CHANGING FACE OF Mental Illness

READ THIS TIMELINE TO
LEARN ABOUT HOW OUR
KNOWLEDGE OF THE WAYS
TO TREAT MENTAL ILLNESS
HAS CHANGED OVER TIME.

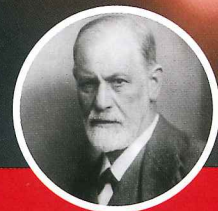


400 BCE–1453 CE

Demonic Possession

Mental illness is thought to be the result of demonic possession. Holes are drilled in the skulls of mentally ill people to allow the evil spirits to leave. Mental illness is also thought to be the result of evil humours (bodily fluids). Treatments include bloodletting and starvation.

demonic possession: controlled by evil spirits
bloodletting: removal of blood for medical treatment

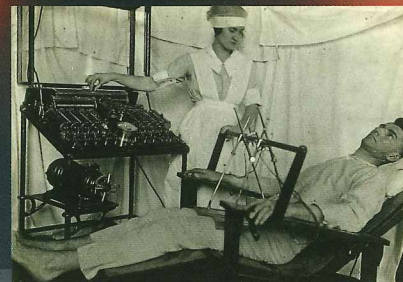


1896

Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud develops a new method of understanding and treating mental illnesses known as psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis relies on patients talking to therapists about anything that comes to mind. Freud also thinks that a great deal can be learned by analyzing a person's dreams. Many of his theories have now been rejected, but Freud changes the way we think about the mind, in particular, the way we think about our unconscious mind.

unconscious mind: mental processes that occur without awareness



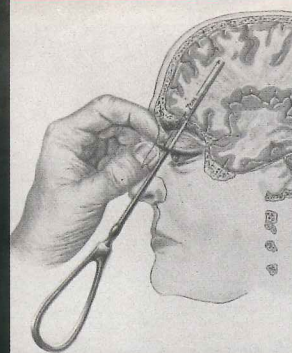
1930s

Shock Therapy

Patients with mental illnesses, such as severe depression, are given medications that cause seizures. It is incorrectly believed that seizures can cure mental illness. Patients are also given electric shocks (electroconvulsive therapy: ECT) to their brains to trigger a brief seizure. Controlled ECT is still used for severe depression that is not responding to other treatments.

seizures: sudden attacks or spasms caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain

1940s–1950s



Lobotomies

Lobotomies are performed on patients to try to relieve their symptoms. This surgery helps reduce violent outbursts in patients, but it has many devastating side effects, including changes in the patient's personality such as becoming listless. This treatment is no longer used.

lobotomies: surgeries where connections between parts of the brain are cut
listless: without energy or enthusiasm

1970s

Sedatives

Benzodiazepines (sedatives, like Valium) increase wildly in popularity. They are prescribed for anxiety and stress, but then it becomes clear that they cause problems with dependence and addiction.

addiction: being physically or mentally dependent on something

1952

Antidepressants

The first antidepressant is introduced in 1952. It is discovered by accident that a medication used to treat a lung disease also has effects on mood. Many new medications have been launched since then. They tend to have fewer side effects and are more effective than earlier antidepressants, but even the newest medications don't work on everyone.

1980

PTSD

For centuries, it is known that disturbing or scary events can cause ongoing trauma, but it is only after the Vietnam War that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is officially recognized as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association. PTSD is now recognized in victims of violence and abuse as well as in war veterans.



2014

Ongoing ...

Despite social programs and advances in psychiatric care, about 25 to 50 percent of homeless people have a serious mental illness. Twenty percent of Canadians experience some kind of mental health problem in their lifetime. Sixty percent of people who are struggling with mental health issues won't get help, for reasons ranging from embarrassment or fear of being judged to not knowing where to go.

DIVE
DEEPER

What other treatments for mental illness could be added to this timeline?

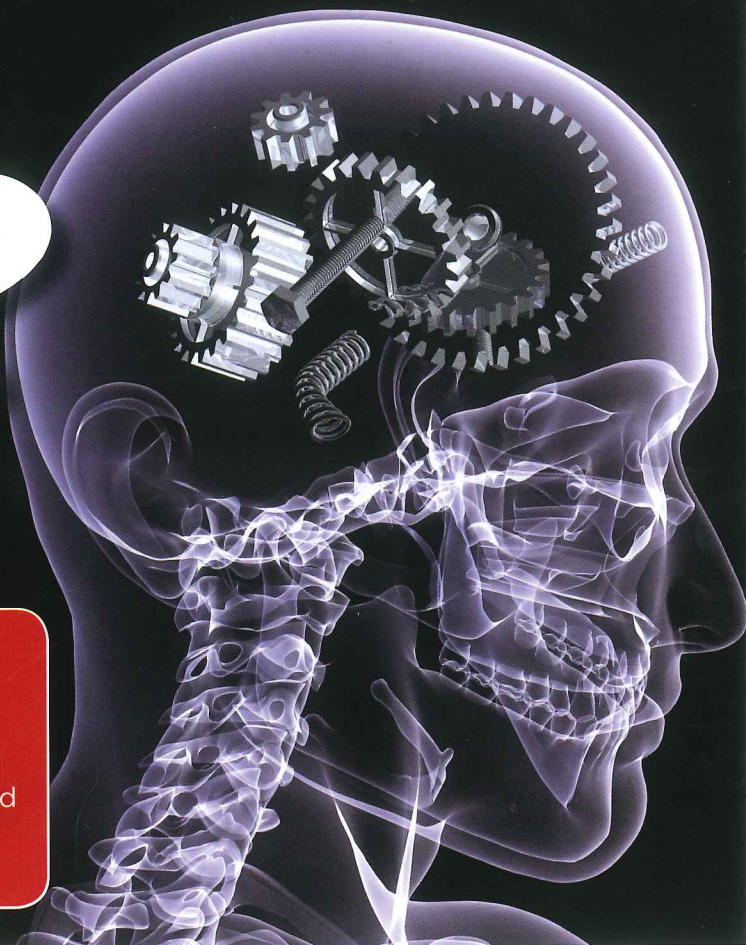
TIMELINE

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

START UP

What are the signs that someone has good (or poor) mental health?

NOT THAT LONG AGO, IT WAS CONSIDERED UNIMPORTANT TO DEAL WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS. Today, more attention is being paid to the issue of poor mental health with the goal of making positive changes in the lives of those affected by it. This report gives an overview of mental health issues facing young people in Canada.



In March 2013, the Mental Health Commission of Canada released a report called *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy for Canada*. The report suggests that mental health issues have been ignored for far too long and can't be ignored any longer. The Canadian Mental Health Association estimates that 10 to 20 percent of youths in Canada live with a mental illness. The first symptoms of mental illness usually appear between the ages of 14 and 24.

PREVENTION

Like any other health problem, prevention is far better than treatment. This means there has to be a lot of effort spent on mental health promotion. The needs of the population vary across the country and among different age groups and economic backgrounds.

There are things we know that help improve mental health for everyone. These include a sense of belonging, good relationships, and good physical health. Having a good support network, such as your family, friends, coaches, teachers, and even a pet, can help you create that sense of belonging. You can also support your own mental health by being active in your life. You can play sports, go for a walk, hang out with your friends, walk the dog, or just take time for yourself to do what you enjoy.

What are other things that can improve mental health?

Some things are known to have a negative impact, including trauma, substance abuse, or a family history of mental illness. For example, we know that suicide is more of an issue in certain groups, such as Aboriginal people and the gay community.

TREATMENT

Sadly, only one in five children who need mental health services get any kind of treatment. Why? They may think no one cares, they may think what they are feeling is normal, or they may even be afraid they won't be heard. Some may also have had bad experiences when they opened up to someone.

But early intervention and treatment are critical. You can benefit from the people in your life that support you. Talk to family and friends, school staff, people in your community, or a counsellor or therapist. There are many treatment options available. Sometimes, a period of psychotherapy (talk therapy) is enough to help you understand and deal with the issue. Other times, longer periods of therapy or medications, such as antidepressants, are required.

We also need to find ways to make treatments available to more people. It can be hard to know whom to talk to. Finding help is a big problem in rural and northern areas of Canada, where fewer resources are available. There may be ways to reach people in the North, such as by using the Internet.

It can also be difficult to find people to talk to if your first language isn't English or French. Many Canadians are immigrants. It may be difficult to find therapists who speak other languages.

RECOVERY

Sometimes, it isn't possible to be cured or to make the problem disappear completely, but that's okay. Recovery means gaining control and taking charge of your life, even if there are lingering mental health issues. Many options are available to keep things under control and improve your quality of life.

STIGMA

Perhaps the most important change needs to be to decrease the stigma around mental illness. The fear of being stigmatized is one of the biggest barriers to change because it stops young people from getting help. We all need to work very hard to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. But things are definitely looking up. More attention is being paid to mental health, from the media to schools to the government.

HELPFUL PROGRAMS

Here are just a few provincial and territorial programs to treat mental health problems.

- In British Columbia, **FRIENDS for Life** helps children with a variety of problems, such as anxiety.
- Quebec has a depression awareness campaign called **Partners for Life**, which is for young people in high school.
- In New Brunswick, the **I'm Thumbbody** program is designed for children in grade 3 to promote mental health. Trained volunteers teach children about self-esteem and to recognize and accept their feelings.
- In Newfoundland, **CHANNAL** (Consumers' Health Awareness Network Newfoundland and Labrador) is dedicated to building a strong self-help network and peer-support system.
- **The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids)** in Toronto has partnered with the Nunavut government to deliver services to Inuit youth in remote locations via video links.

DIVE DEEPER

What programs are there in your community for young people who are struggling with mental health issues?



MEDIA PORTRAYAL of MENTAL ILLNESS

START UP

Is mental illness accurately portrayed in the media? Why or why not?

MANY CARTOONS, MOVIES, BOOKS, AND TV SHOWS FEATURE CHARACTERS WITH SOME KIND OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE.

Sometimes, the mental health problem is the main story; other times, it is just a feature of some of the people in the story. But have you ever thought about whether the way that mental illness is portrayed is accurate? How are people with mental illnesses portrayed? How are psychiatrists and mental health institutions portrayed? Check out these examples and try to figure out if they are helpful or harmful to those with mental health issues.



PEANUTS (1950–2000)

Peanuts existed as a newspaper comic strip from 1950 to 2000. There were also *Peanuts* television specials and a stage musical.

Peanuts was the first comic strip that portrayed children with real problems. In the comic strip, Charlie Brown is portrayed as anxious, insecure, and depressed. Lucy is bossy and disagreeable, but also seems insecure, needing Linus and Charlie Brown to compliment her. She sometimes acts as a psychiatrist delivering bad advice. In an early comic strip, Charlie Brown says he has “deep feelings of depression,” and Lucy’s response is to “snap out of it.” The downside of *Peanuts* is that the characters do not change. They never gain insight into their personalities or learn how to live better lives.

DISNEY MOVIES

One study of Disney animated movies found that 85 percent of the movies had someone (or an animal) that was described as being crazy, nuts, loony, or some other negative description of the mentally ill. Think of *Beauty and the Beast*. Belle’s father, Maurice, is described as being crazy and ends up being taken away in a “loony wagon.”

Why does Disney include this type of portrayal in its movies? Do you find it funny? Does this contribute to the stigma about mental illness?



THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER (2012)

In this movie, Charlie, played by Logan Lerman, feels alone and alienated as he enters high school. He is befriended by half-siblings Sam and Patrick, who help him deal with mental health issues caused by childhood trauma and the suicide of a friend. The issues of mental illness are presented without actually naming them.

This movie is an excellent portrayal of a teenager working through sadness, grief, and anger. Charlie is neither a victim nor a saint. The movie also shows that you may not be cured of mental illness, but you can be healed.

SCHIZOPHRENIA IN THE MOVIES

One type of mental illness that has been treated poorly in the movies is schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that affects thinking and emotional responses. People with schizophrenia may have delusions, hear voices, or lack motivation. Schizophrenia is treated with medications, therapy, and sometimes hospitalization. While there is no cure, with proper treatment, many people with schizophrenia can live normal lives.

In the movies, people with schizophrenia are often portrayed as having two or more distinct personalities. This is inaccurate. Some portrayals also suggest that people with schizophrenia are more likely to commit violent crimes, but this is rarely the case. In fact, people with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violence than to commit it. *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) and *Benny and Joon* (1993) are movies that treat schizophrenia reasonably accurately.

delusions: *false beliefs*



SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK (2012)

In this movie, Bradley Cooper plays a man who has bipolar disorder, a disease that causes people to have episodes of depression as well as episodes of manic behaviour. He has just left a psychiatric hospital, but his doctors don’t think he is ready to be released. He has to go live with his parents. He doesn’t like to take his medications because of the way they make him feel. He thinks he can control his illness with a positive outlook on life. In this movie, people with mental illness are shown to be likable, even if they have flaws.

Doctors were concerned about the way the movie suggests that it is possible to treat mental illness with willpower, and that love conquers all. No one would think that you could treat diabetes that way, so why would anyone think that mental illness was any different? It would be a very bad thing if people thought that they could throw away their medications and just cure themselves with the power of positive thinking.

manic: *frantic; extremely excited*
willpower: *ability to control yourself*

DIVE DEEPER

Think of a movie or TV show that has a character in it with a mental illness. How is that character portrayed? Is he or she violent? Lovable? Silly? What is your opinion of how the character is portrayed?

A Natural ANTIDEPRESSANT?

START UP

Have you ever had a feeling of awe when looking at a beautiful landscape? How might this feeling affect your mental health?

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF? Hospitals? Psychiatrists?

Maybe medications like antidepressants? All these things are very important, but often something as easy as spending time outside in beautiful natural surroundings can help keep us happier and calmer.

More and more people are moving to cities. In Canada, about 85 percent of the population is expected to be urban by 2030. An urban environment can be stressful with air and noise pollution and a fast-paced lifestyle. Green spaces may be one way to recharge your mental batteries.

A 2013 study in *Psychological Science* showed that living near green spaces improved people's mental health. This study, which followed 10 000 people in Britain over 18 years, concluded that people living in cities have less mental distress and a better sense of well-being when they live near a park. These results were independent of other factors such as crime rate, income, employment, and physical health.

Why is it important to consider these other factors?

Other scientific studies have shown the following:

- Spending even five minutes a day in nature increases self-esteem.
- Children diagnosed with ADHD function better when outside in a natural setting (such as playing soccer on a soccer field) than in a built environment (such as a classroom).
- People who live in apartments are happier when they have a view of a natural setting, especially trees.
- Workers who can see plants from their workspace take fewer sick days and report greater work satisfaction.
- Time spent in nature can help improve creativity.
- Having wilderness or nature-based experiences has physical and mental health benefits, such as lowering body fat, reducing anxiety and stress, and increasing self-esteem.



FOREST BATHING

In Japan, the government has recognized the importance of nature as a way to help people deal with stress. There is a network of trails called the Forest Therapy Trails. These trails criss-cross the country and allow people to practise what they call *shinrin-yoku*, or forest bathing.

Researchers in Japan are studying the effect that being in nature has on people and have already found that it leads to a reduction in stress hormones in the body. There is also a drop in heart rate and blood pressure. People also say that they are in a better mood and feel less anxious. The results are so promising that about a quarter of the Japanese population are using these trails.

hormones: chemicals that regulate how the body functions

DIVE DEEPER

What do you like or dislike about spending time in natural places? Why?