

B4Stage4 Get Informed

When you or someone close to you starts to experience the early warning signs of mental illness, knowing what the risk factors and symptoms are will help to catch them early. Often times, family and friends are the first to support a person through these early stages. Like other health conditions, we need to address the symptoms early, identify the underlying illness, and plan an appropriate course of action on a path towards overall health.

Risk Factors

Genes

17-28%

of risk for mental illnesses can be accounted for by variations in common genes.

Much stronger links were found in twin and family studies. Estimates for total heritability, or how much a disease is tied to genetics, are¹:

- Schizophrenia 81%
- Bipolar disorder 75%
- ADHD 75%
- Depression 37%



Biology

In one study, head injury between the ages of 11-15 was the strongest predictor for development of schizophrenia, depression, and bipolar disorder.²



Brain changes like building a "tolerance" or reward response to stress, or abnormalities in the prefrontal and frontal cortex, and irregularities in the function of the neurotransmitter glutamate are also risk factors for mental illness and substance use.⁴



Environment

People who are exposed to adverse childhood events including abuse, neglect, divorce, witnessing domestic violence and having parents who have substance use issues, mental illnesses or are in jail are:

2.6x
more likely to have depression

5x
more likely to have serious alcohol problems



17x
more likely to have learning or behavioral problems

3x
more likely to have serious job problems³

Lifestyle

Substance use can increase chances of developing a mental illness

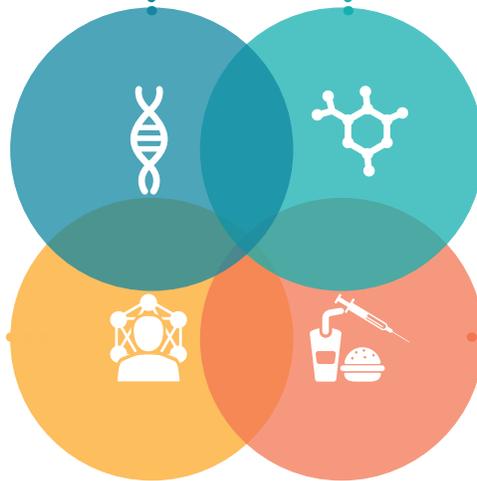
and having a mental illness can increase risk of using substances

People with any mental illness are:

2.3x
as likely to develop nicotine dependence

3x
more likely to develop alcohol dependence

30x
more likely to develop illicit drug dependence⁵



Early Warning Signs and Symptoms

Having a combination of symptoms (not just one symptom) indicates that someone might be showing signs of a mental health condition. Be aware of these symptoms when they last longer than a few weeks:



Problems with concentration, memory, or ability to think clearly



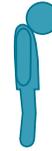
Changes in eating such as loss of appetite or overeating



Not being able to complete school or work tasks



Feeling overly worried



Feeling sad, empty, hopeless, or worthless



Sensitivity to sounds, sight, smell, or touch



Irritability and restlessness



Loss of interest in activities that are normally enjoyable, withdrawal from others, or disconnection



Feeling like your brain is playing tricks on you. Hearing knocking or scratching sounds, or name being called



Changes in energy level and sleep patterns. Often someone will sleep during the day and be up at night

Signs and symptoms that require immediate attention:

- Thoughts or plans of killing or hurting one's self or another person
- Hearing voices or seeing things that no one else can hear or see
- Unexplainable changes in thinking, speech, or writing
- Being overly suspicious or fearful
- Serious drop in school or work performance
- Sudden personality changes that are bizarre or out of character

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.



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Sources

- ¹ Cross-Disorder Group of the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium. Genetic relationship between five psychiatric disorders estimated from genome-wide SNPs. *Nature Genetics*, August 11, 2013. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2013/new-data-reveal-extent-of-genetic-overlap-between-major-mental-disorders.shtml>.
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- ³ Burke, N. J., Hellman, J. L., Scott, B. G., Weems, C. F., & Carrion, V. G. (2011). The impact of adverse childhood experiences on an urban pediatric population. *Child abuse & neglect*, 35(6), 408-413. http://acestudy.org/files/Review_of_ACE_Study_with_references_summary_table_2_.pdf
- ⁴ Brady, K. T., & Sinha, R. (2014). Co-occurring mental and substance use disorders: the neurobiological effects of chronic stress.
- ⁵ Swendsen, J., Conway, K. P., Degenhardt, L., Glantz, M., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Kessler, R. C. (2010). Mental disorders as risk factors for substance use, abuse and dependence: results from the 10-year follow-up of the National Comorbidity Survey. *Addiction*, 105(6), 1117-1128.