



July is Mental Illness Awareness Month

As the theme suggests, the month is about creating awareness around mental wellness to help save lives and break the stigma around mental illness.

But what is mental illness and how can it affect your life?

A mental illness is a health issue which can affect your thoughts, mood, or behavior and it can impact the way you perceive the world around you. It may also cause you distress, affecting how you cope at work, how you function in relationships and your ability to manage everyday tasks.

Mental illnesses can last for a short time, a few weeks or in severe cases, it can be life-long and cause serious disability.

The following factors may lead to mental illness:

- If you abuse alcohol and/or drugs.
- If you suffer from a serious medical condition.
- If you experienced traumatic brain injury.
- If you have a biological chemical imbalance.
- If you isolate yourself from others.
- If it's in your genes, meaning you may inherit the tendency to develop mental health issues, given a certain set of circumstances.



What are the types of mental illnesses?

- **Mood disorders** e.g., depression and bipolar disorder mainly affects your emotional state.
- **Substance abuse disorder** affects your brain and behaviour, leading to an inability to control your use of substances.
- **Anxiety disorders.** Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. However, if you suffer from anxiety disorder, you will frequently have intense, excessive, and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations.
- **Psychotic disorders** e.g., schizophrenia is characterised by disconnection from reality which results in strange behaviour, often accompanied by disturbances of thought (excessive suspiciousness, guilt, etc.) and perception (hearing voices, seeing things, feeling things etc.)
- **Personality disorders (PD)** are a group of mental illnesses. They include Antisocial Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder and many more. They involve long-term patterns of thoughts and behaviours that are unhealthy and inflexible.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is a mental and behavioural disorder that develops from experiencing a traumatic event, such as sexual assault, warfare, traffic collisions, child abuse, domestic violence, or other threats on a person's life or well-being



How can you improve your mental wellness?

- Get some exercise, even if it's just going for a walk.
- Do something that relaxes you, for example, read a book or listen to music.
- Spend time outdoors and enjoy the beauty of nature.
- Maintain a healthy diet by eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Make sure you get enough sleep.
- Socialise with others.
- Show gratitude and be thankful for what you've got.
- Create a routine for yourself because it will give your life structure.
- Avoid using drugs as it influences your thoughts and mood.
- Know that you are not alone, and we are here to help you if you need it.



If you think you're suffering from any of the mental illnesses mentioned above and you need help, reach out to our Mental Health Services on 014 590 1700 or 080 000 6942. You can also contact one of our EAP Counsellors (010 133 0525) who are available 24/7 to offer counselling and support.