

Mental health

Did you know that one in four adults in the UK will experience mental health difficulties at some stage in their lifetime?

Our mental well-being is affected by a whole variety of social and environmental factors. We all have times when we may feel stressed, anxious or low. Sometimes these periods can become prolonged and intense and may affect our ability to cope with everyday life. Students with no previous mental health issues can develop such difficulties and people with mental health issues, who are generally able to cope effectively can have a recurrence of distressing symptoms in stressful situations.

This leaflet is for all students who are interested in mental health and gives some basic information to those who may be experiencing mental health difficulties themselves, or are concerned about someone they are close to.

Common mental health issues

The following section gives common symptoms associated with particular mental health problems. It should not be used as a checklist and is not intended to be exhaustive. Diagnosis can only be made by a qualified clinician. However it may be helpful if you are wondering if there is cause for concern.

Depression, anxiety and stress

Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health difficulties likely to be experienced by students. Feeling low or anxious is a normal response to many situations, but may become a problem if this continues or is very overwhelming.

Depression involves a lowering of mood that doesn't change over time. It can be difficult to concentrate and studies can suffer. It may be hard to feel anything matters and you may withdraw from academic and social activities. You may have thoughts about harming yourself.

Anxiety involves feelings of worry, fear or dread. When anxiety becomes severe you may find it hard to face particular situations (e.g. sitting an exam), or to make simple decisions about everyday life. You may not be able to sleep, may experience panic attacks or physical sensations of nausea or difficulties in breathing.

Phobias

This is an overwhelming fear of a particular thing or situation, for example enclosed spaces. Your life may become ruled by trying to avoid these situations.

Obsessive compulsive behaviour

This involves severe anxiety about things being out of control, which leads you to compulsively perform certain actions repeatedly, for example, washing hands, checking that things are in their place. If these routines are disrupted you can feel extremely distressed.

Eating disorders

Preoccupations with food and weight are common in this society, but for an increasing number of people these thoughts can become obsessive.

Anorexia involves depriving yourself of food, often to the point of starvation. You tend not to see how thin you have become and focus on trying to feel in control of yourself and your body.

People with bulimia binge on large amounts of food and then vomit or take laxatives to regain a sense of control. Not being able to control your intake of food is called compulsive eating.

Bipolar affective disorder

This consists of extreme mood swings: from elation to deep depression. During these "highs" you may have immense energy and drive but this may be channelled in ways that are inappropriate and cause major disruption in your relationships and in managing your day to day life. When feeling "low" you suffer the same symptoms as depression.

Schizophrenia

This condition involves a wide range of experiences and symptoms, which can develop gradually. Similar symptoms can sometimes be induced by extensive use of certain drugs.

You may have strange thoughts about yourself or others that friends and family find hard to understand. You may feel that others are trying to harm or control you. You may hear voices or have hallucinations.

Not all mental health issues fit into these descriptions. However, if you are concerned that you or someone you care about, may be experiencing mental health difficulties which are making it hard to carry on with daily life, help is available. It is important to seek this sooner rather than later and with help, you can recover from, or find ways of coping with your condition, and be able to resume a full and active life.

Support within the University

SilverCloud – Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

SilverCloud is available to all registered students and staff, a free online self-help service to help anyone experiencing a variety of emotional challenges.

SilverCloud offers secure, immediate access to online CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) programmes tailored to your specific needs to support you in setting yourself goals, problem solving and building up your life skills. These programmes have demonstrated high improvement rates for depression and anxiety.

There are currently four programmes available to students and staff:

- Anxious thoughts and feelings-
- Depression and low mood
- Stress
- Body image

Sign up to SilverCloud today at:

mdxwellbeing.silvercloudhealth.com/signup

For students seeking information or support with issues relating to their mental health, there are a number of useful services at the university. Please see **unihub.mdx.ac.uk** for full contact details of the Disability Support and Counselling Services.

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find these services. The Counselling Service can be contacted at: **cmh@mdx.ac.uk**

Outside the University

Your doctor can also give you advice and can suggest, and help you to access, other forms of help. This may include medication or asking a psychiatrist to see you to give you an assessment of your mental state and offer you more specialised help.

Useful contacts

Samaritans 116 123

Saneline 0300 304 7000

Mind 0300 123 3393

Further leaflets in this series

Abuse

Addictive behaviour

Anxiety and panic

Bereavement and loss

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Coming to Britain to study

Coping with trauma

Depression

Eating disorders

Exam anxiety