

What doctors want patients to know to improve their mental health

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Sara Berg, MS

News Editor

Conversations surrounding mental health continue to gain momentum, breaking down barriers of stigma and encouraging open dialogues. But navigating the complexities of mental health can be a challenging journey. Knowing how to address mental health concerns can make a significant difference.

In the U.S., more than 20% of adults live with a mental health condition. Meanwhile, about one in 20 adults live with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression. Additionally, half of all chronic mental illness begins by 14 years old, [according to the American Psychiatric Association](#).

Additionally, the prevalence of any mental illness was highest among adults who reported two or more races at 34.9%. This was followed by Native American and Alaskan Native adults at 26.6%. Meanwhile, 23.9% of white individuals and 21.4% of Black adults had any mental illness. The prevalence of any mental illness was lowest among adults who are Asian at 16.4%, [according to the National Institute of Mental Health](#).

Here is a list from the AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series—which provides physicians with a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's health care headlines—on some steps patients can take to keep their mental health front and center.

The list features advice from physicians at organizations that are members of the [AMA Health System Program](#), which provides enterprise solutions to equip leadership, physicians and care teams with resources to help drive the future of medicine.

1 Depression is not your fault

It creeps in quietly, often unnoticed, until the weight becomes unbearable. Depression, often a master of disguise, hides behind smiles and routine, casting its shadow on countless lives. Despite its prevalence, stigma and misunderstanding frequently overshadow discussions about depression's reality, leaving many to struggle in isolation. But as the conversation about mental health grows louder, the veil is lifting.

[Andrea DeSimone, DO](#), a psychiatrist at [Bayhealth](#) Medical Center in Dover, Delaware, took time to discuss what patients need to know about depression.

2 Practice coping skills for anxiety disorders

Anxiety is a shared human experience. For instance, the prospect of speaking in front of a large group of people or taking a test can trigger anxiety. Yet this unease can also serve as a catalyst for diligent preparation and rehearsal. But if feelings of extreme fear and turmoil become overpowering and hinder routine activities, this may indicate an underlying anxiety disorder. Two psychiatrists discuss how to recognize and manage anxiety disorders.

Two psychiatrists share more about recognizing and managing anxiety disorders, including [Sandra Swantek, MD](#), a geriatric psychiatrist in Chicago at [Rush University System for Health](#).

3 Behavioral treatment is vital for ADHD

With distractions just a click away, some minds struggle to tune out the noise. For children, teens or adults who are inclined to race ahead, juggle thoughts and wrestle with focus, the problem is more than just dealing with everyday distractions. This restlessness and impulsivity are part of a condition that

affects millions in the U.S. and often goes unnoticed or is misunderstood: Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

[Jonathan Shook, MD](#), a pediatrician and medical director at [Hattiesburg Clinic Connections](#), shares what patients need to know about ADHD.

4 **Be aware of postpartum depression**

Navigating the delicate phase following pregnancy can be challenging. From physical recovery to emotional well-being, the postpartum period—which begins after delivery demands careful attention and support. Despite advances in medical understanding and increased awareness, gaps in postpartum care persist, putting many women at higher risk of worse outcomes. Knowing what to expect and when to seek care is key to improving health outcomes and experiences postpartum.

[Jennifer Heer Ford, MD](#), an ob-gyn with [Baptist Health Medical Group](#) in Louisville, Kentucky, shares what doctors want patients to know about postpartum care.

5 **Don't be afraid to bring up misophonia**

Tensions rise in the quiet corners of everyday life, where the gentle clinking of cutlery or the faint tapping of a keyboard can evoke a visceral reaction. This is misophonia, where seemingly innocuous sounds can trigger intense emotional responses in those living with the condition. Misophonia can trigger a fight-or-flight response, causing those affected to avoid places or situations. And while misophonia does not yet have official recognition as a distinct disorder in the latest edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR) or the International Classification of Diseases, experts still recognize it and patients affected deserve answers.

Two physicians discuss what they want patients to know about misophonia, including [John C. Goddard, MD](#), who specializes in otology, neurotology and skull base surgery at [Northwest Permanente](#) in Portland, Oregon.

6 Find ways to reduce decision fatigue

From the moment we wake up, we are seemingly bombarded with choices—what to wear, what to eat, which emails to answer first. By the time we’ve navigated our morning routine, our mental energy has already taken a hit. And as the day wears on, the sheer weight of decision-making can start to take its toll, often without us even realizing it. Making decisions day in and day out can be exhausting and cause people to feel overwhelmed, anxious or stressed. This is known as decision fatigue, which is a state of mental overload that can impede a person’s ability to continue making decisions.

[Lisa MacLean, MD](#), a psychiatrist and chief wellness officer at [Henry Ford Health](#) in Detroit, took the time to discuss what patients need to know about decision fatigue.

7 Birth control is OK for women with depression

Social media platforms—particularly TikTok—have become hotbeds of misinformation about birth control, with highly persuasive videos vilifying hormonal contraception. Myths and misinformation in circulation have caused significant concern among physicians as they see an increasing number of women discontinuing their contraceptives.

[Kimberly Dawn Warner, MD](#), an ob-gyn and chair of government relations at [Colorado Permanente Medical Group](#), debunks many of the birth-control myths that have been circulating on social media.

Mental health issues can impact both patients and physicians. That is why the AMA is committed to keeping you up to date with articles on the [latest mental health news and developments](#).