

What is Mental Health vs. What is Mental Illness?

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is a “state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being - not just the absence of illness”. **Everyone** has mental health, but it can vary from poor to optimal. Supportive relationships with family members and/or friends, proper sleep, a healthy diet, and regular exercise are beneficial to mental health.

Mental illnesses are “emotional, behavioural and brain-related difficulties that interfere with development, relationships, attendance, and achievement” (School Mental Health Ontario). In general, mental illnesses affect how we function in life. One in five Canadians in any given year will experience a mental illness or addiction.

Mental health and mental illness are separate, yet interrelated concepts that vary on a continuum. Mental health and mental illness can be experienced simultaneously and individuals can experience any degree of mental health and mental illness. For example, it is possible to experience poor mental health with no mental illness; an individual might be lacking supportive relationships, have a poor diet, and feel lethargic while not having a mental illness. Another example is having optimal mental health while having serious mental illness; an individual with a diagnosed mental illness might be responding well to medical and therapeutic intervention, have a healthy diet, exercise regularly and be coping well with everyday life stresses.



For more information about the relationship between mental health and mental illness, visit **Promoting Mental Health: Finding a Shared Language** video from Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klswi_4yRaE