

# Understanding the Spectrum of Mental Health



## What is mental health?

Our mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we feel, how we see ourselves, how we handle stress, how we make choices, and how we relate to others. It has a powerful influence on our quality of life.

Good mental health means more than not having a mental illness. A person can have poor mental health and still not have a mental illness. And just because someone doesn't have a mental illness doesn't mean they have good mental health.

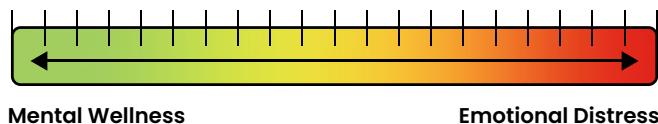
## What is the connection between mental health and physical health?

Mental health and physical health are equally important and closely related. For example, exercise can improve both physical and mental health, and good mental health can help prevent and manage diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

We all have good days and bad days. When we wake up feeling sick, we know what to do. We adjust our plans so we can rest. We may even visit our doctor. But when we feel mentally unwell, we may not know what to do and may be less likely to act. Mental health problems are no less serious than physical health problems. **Just as with physical health, it is important to strengthen and support our mental health before there is a serious problem.**

## What is the spectrum of mental health?

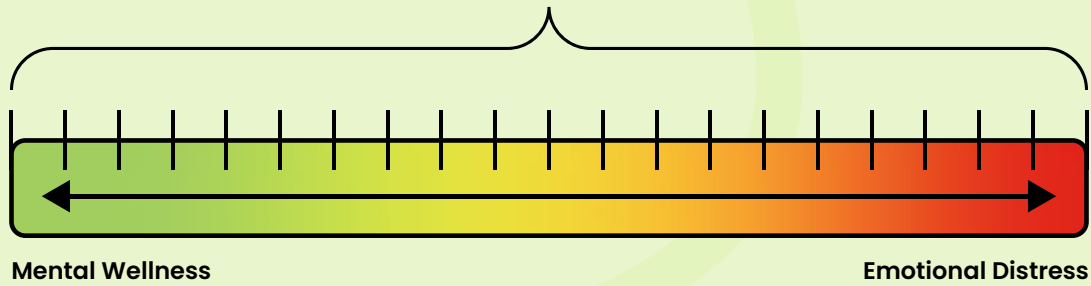
Imagine a spectrum running from mental wellness to mental suffering. Everyone falls somewhere on the spectrum, and where we fall can change over time, depending on many factors.



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## Mental Health Continuum



**Green:** The green zone is a state of mental wellness. Being in this zone doesn't mean being completely free from stress or worry. It means coping fairly well with the normal stresses and worries of life. A person in the green zone functions normally in terms of sleep, appetite and nutrition, physical activity, work patterns, and personal relationships.

**In the green zone, you can maintain good mental health by taking care of yourself and connecting with others.**

**Yellow:** Being in the yellow zone means being in an unsettled state of mind. A person may worry more or have more negative thoughts than usual. Their eating and sleeping habits may change, and they may have trouble focusing on work or other tasks.

**In the yellow zone, you should act to restore your mental health by practicing self-care and connecting with family and friends. You may also want to think about talking to a professional.**

**Orange:** Being in the orange zone means having a hard time coping with daily life. In this zone, a person may have trouble concentrating, may feel exhausted, and may experience moods so low that it seems hard to do anything well. They may sleep poorly or lose their appetite. Their work and personal relationships may suffer as a result.

**In the orange zone, you should take immediate action by seeking professional help. Call a crisis line to talk with a trained counselor. Ask for support from family and friends.**

**Red:** The red zone is the crisis zone. In this zone, a person experiences severe anxiety, depression, or suffering so intense that it becomes difficult to get through the day. They may struggle to eat, sleep, or practice basic hygiene. A person may experience so much emotional pain that it leads to thoughts of suicide or self-harm. The warning signs for suicide include sudden changes in mood, uncontrolled anger, reckless behavior, severe anxiety or agitation, feeling desperate or trapped, and having no sense of purpose.

**In the red zone, you are in a state of emergency and need to get help now. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 to talk with a trained counselor.** Seek help from a mental health professional, doctor, counselor, or clergy member. Reach out to connect with family and friends—let them know you are in crisis and ask for their support. Take time right away to prioritize getting the help you need.

Determining where you or someone you care about falls on the mental health spectrum can **help you to catch problems early and take action to prevent things from getting worse.**



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