

# When Should I be Referred to a Psychiatrist?

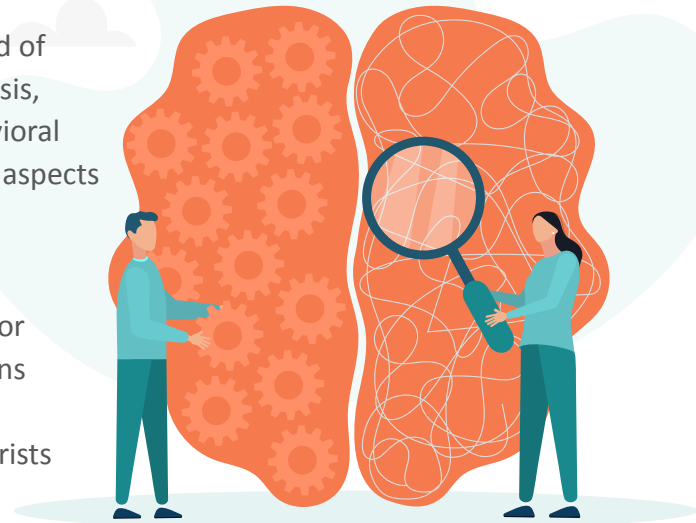


## When Should I be Referred to a Psychiatrist?

### WHAT IS A PSYCHIATRIST?

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who's an expert in the field of psychiatry — the branch of medicine focused on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders. Psychiatrists assess both the mental and physical aspects of psychological conditions. They can diagnose and treat these conditions.

Psychiatrists can order or perform a variety of medical and/or psychological tests. These tests, combined with conversations about symptoms and medical and family history, allow psychiatrists to diagnose mental health conditions. Psychiatrists also form individualized treatment plans, which can include psychotherapy (talk therapy), medication and other medical treatments.



### WHEN SHOULD I SEE A PSYCHIATRIST?

Mental health episodes may happen randomly, infrequently or be constant. The important thing to remember is that if they're negatively affecting your quality of life, it's a clear sign you need to seek help.

If you have any of the following symptoms or experiences, you may want to consider seeing a psychiatrist or telling your primary healthcare provider:

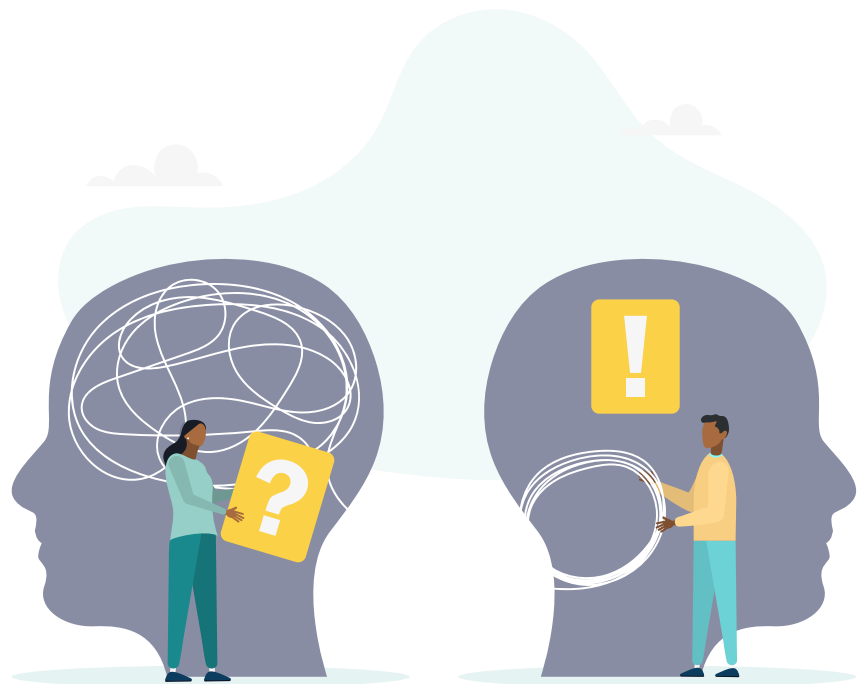
- Inability to manage or control your emotions.
- Continuous or frequent episodes of anger or rage.
- Excessive or irrational fears.
- Engaging in risky behavior.
- Excessive worrying and/or sadness.
- Significant changes in sleep patterns.
- Substance use.
- Eating disorders.
- Declining performance in school or work.
- Withdrawal from social situations.
- Thoughts of self-harm.

## WHEN SHOULD I SEE MY FAMILY DOCTOR OR NURSE PRACTITIONER?

If you've never had mental health treatment before, and you're interested in trying medication, your primary care provider is a good place to start. If you've been in treatment before, you probably already know a little about what works for you and what you want. In this case, it can still be a good choice to go to your primary care provider, especially if they were the one who treated you before and if that treatment was at least somewhat successful.

If your mental health symptoms are mild, it's easier to get your needs met by your primary care provider. Mild to moderate depression and anxiety are among the most common mental health issues, and many primary care providers are already treating them. Most primary care providers are trained to treat these conditions and are familiar with the medications for them.

If your primary concern is physical, or if both mental and physical symptoms are affecting your well-being, your primary care provider can start treating your physical symptoms right away and refer you to a psychiatrist if needed.



## WHAT IS A BEHAVIOUR HEALTH CONSULTANT?

If your family doctor or nurse practitioner is a part of a Primary Care Network (PCN), they may refer you to a Behavioural Health Consultant (BHC) within the PCN. A BHC may be a social worker, registered psychiatric nurse, registered nurse, or occupational therapist. A BHC works with you and your primary care team to support you with a wide variety of mental health, psychosocial, motivational, and medical concerns. A BHC can help you develop coping strategies for issues such as anger, anxiety, grief, depression, or stress; make action plans for lifestyle changes; and reduce symptoms and cope better with chronic conditions. BHCs typically do not provide traditional psychotherapy. A BHC provides a mix of scheduled and in the moment consultation or assessment, behavioural treatment planning, recommendations, and interventions. Appointments are typically 20-30 minutes for targeted interventions. A BHC may help you navigate to find other mental health supports such as psychiatrists, psychologists, or mental health therapists if appropriate.



## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PSYCHIATRIST AND A PSYCHOLOGIST?

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who can diagnose and treat mental health conditions. They can prescribe medications and other medical treatments.

A psychologist has a degree, typically in clinical psychology, and often has extensive training in research or clinical practice. Psychologists treat mental health conditions with psychotherapy (talk therapy). A psychologist can't prescribe medication.

Psychiatrists typically treat more complex mental health conditions than psychologists, especially ones that require medication or medical treatments. Psychology is the study of the mind, emotions and behavior; whereas psychiatry is the field of medicine focused on diagnosing and treating mental health conditions. You can have both a psychiatrist and psychologist.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PSYCHIATRIST AND A MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST/COUNSELLOR?

A therapist has a degree in a mental health-related field such as psychology, counseling psychology or family therapy. They're qualified to evaluate a person's mental health and use therapeutic techniques, such as talk therapy. Examples of therapists include licensed social workers and licensed professional clinical counselors. A therapist can't prescribe medication. You can have both a psychiatrist and mental health therapist/counsellor.



### References

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22702-psychiatrist>  
<https://blog.opencounseling.com/physician-vs-psychiatrist/>  
<https://enpcn.com/behavioural-health/>