

On My Own: Managing Symptoms and Medication

Participant Guide



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Lesson One: Introduction and Living with a Mental Health Condition

Learning Objectives:

1. Introduce the group to participants and establish group rules
2. Discuss living with a mental health condition

Introduction:

If you have a mental health condition, you’re not alone. One in 5 American adults experiences some form of mental illness in any given year. And across the population, 1 in every 25 adults is living with a serious mental health condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or long-term recurring major depression. Some of the more common disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, dementia, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders. Symptoms may include changes in mood, personality, personal habits and/or social withdrawal. They can make daily activities difficult and impair a person’s ability to work, interact with family, and fulfill other major life roles.

As with other serious illnesses, mental illness is not your fault or that of the people around you, but widespread misunderstandings about mental illness remain. Many people don’t seek treatment or remain unaware that their symptoms could be connected to a mental health condition. People may expect a person with serious mental illness to look visibly different from others, and they may tell someone who doesn’t “look ill” to “get over it” through willpower. These misperceptions add to the challenges of living with a mental health condition.

Mental health problems may be related to excessive stress due to a particular situation or series of events. As with cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, mental illnesses are often physical as well as emotional and psychological. Mental illnesses may be caused by a reaction to environmental stresses, genetic factors, biochemical imbalances, or a combination of these. They can make daily activities difficult and impair a person’s ability to work, interact with family, and fulfill other major life functions. With proper care and treatment many individuals learn to cope or recover from a mental illness or emotional disorder.

Every year people overcome the challenges of mental illness to do the things they enjoy. Through developing and following a treatment plan, you can dramatically reduce many of your symptoms. People with mental health conditions can and do pursue higher education, succeed in their careers, make friends and have relationships. Mental illness can slow us down, but we don’t need to let it stop us. (Living with a mental health condition, Mental Health America, SAMHSA and NAMI)

This group will cover topics such as learning about mental health diagnoses, how to manage symptoms, and the possible role of medication in your treatment plan.

Before we get started, let’s get to know each other a bit better. It’s important to establish group rules. This way, everyone in the room can have the same expectations of each other for the group.

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| Exercise: Getting to Know You!  Purpose: To have participants introduce themselves and learn something unique about their peers  Supplies Needed: None  Directions: Ask participants to introduce themselves. Ask them to share their name, and their favorite meal with the group. |

Now that everyone has had a chance to get to know each other, let’s make some decisions about group rules. It’s important for everyone to feel comfortable in the group setting.

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| Exercise: Establishing Group Rules  Supplies Needed: Flip chart or white board and markers  Purpose: To set group rules so that everyone feels safe in the group environment  Directions: Brainstorm a list of rules you would like for the group, Have a discussion with your fellow group members to come up with an agreement on rules. Common group rules include starting on time, not leaving the group early, not interrupting others when they are speaking, and giving everyone the opportunity to share in the group process. |

Thank you for participating in the first lesson! Our next session will focus on definitions of recovery. We will also talk about what helps us in our recovery journey.

Lesson Two: Recovery is Possible!

Learning objectives:

1. Learn the definition of recovery
2. Learn about the process that supports recovery and identify personal experiences with the recovery process

Lesson Two is about recovery. Recovery from a behavioral health condition is possible! We will explore the definition of recovery in group today and have a discussion about what we experience on our personal journeys to recovery.

Recovering from a mental illness includes not only getting better, but achieving a full and satisfying life. Many people affirm that their journey to recovery has not been a straight, steady road. Rather there are ups and downs, new discoveries and setbacks. Over time, it is possible to look back and see, despite the halting progress and discouragements, how far we have really come. Each time we reach a milestone, we see that we have recovered a piece of our lives and we draw new strength from it. The journey to full recovery takes time, but positive changes can happen all along the way.

One definition of recovery is that it is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.

There are four dimensions that support a life in recovery.

Hope, the belief that these challenges and conditions can be overcome, is the foundation of recovery. A person’s recovery is built on his or her strengths, talents, coping abilities, resources, and inherent values. It is holistic, addresses the whole person and their community, and is supported by peers, friends and family members.

The process of recovery is highly personal and occurs via many pathways. It may include clinical treatment, medications, faith-based approaches, peer support, family support, self-care, and other approaches. Recovery is characterized by continual growth and improvement in one’s health and wellness that may involve setbacks. Because setbacks are a natural part of life, resilience becomes a key component of recovery.

Resilience refers to an individual’s ability to cope with adversity and adapt to challenges or change. Resilience develops over time and gives an individual the capacity not only to cope with life’s challenges but also to be better prepared for the next stressful situation. Optimism and the ability to remain hopeful are essential to resilience and the process of recovery.

The process of recovery is supported through relationships and social networks. This often involves family members who become the champions of their loved one’s recovery. They provide essential support to their family member’s journey of recovery and similarly experience the moments of positive healing as well as the difficult challenges. Families of people in recovery may experience adversities in their social, occupational, and financial lives, as well as in their overall quality of family life. These experiences can lead to increased family stress, guilt, shame, anger, fear, anxiety, loss, grief and isolation. The concept of resilience in recovery is also vital for family members who need access to intentional supports that promote their health and well-being. The support of peers and friends is also crucial in engaging and supporting individuals in recovery.

Let’s take a look at a list of some of the positive factors that promote recovery and have a discussion about them.

1. Strong social networks
2. Stable living conditions
3. Safe and structured environment
4. Sense of purpose or direction, feeling of contributing to society
5. Someone to discuss experiences and feelings with and provide practical help
6. A good understanding of what has happened
7. Physical well-being
8. Effective medication without distressing side effects
9. Sense of realistic expectation and hope about the future

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| Discussion Questions:   1. What has worked for you in the past? What tools have you used in the past to help you with your recovery? 2. What is important to you to have a balanced life? 3. Where do you feel a sense of belonging? Who are the people most important to you? 4. What gives you strength to get through the day? What do you think about? And what do you do that gives you strength? |

Thanks for sharing your answers with the group! As you can see, recovery is a very personal experience. We may have some things in common when we talk about our recovery journeys. It’s also important to recognize that we all have personal preferences and experiences with recovery.

The next lesson will focus on facts about mental health conditions. See you then!

Lesson Three: Facts about Mental Health Conditions

Learning objectives:

1. Learn about common mental health diagnoses and their symptoms
2. Reiterate that recovery is possible and discuss various paths to wellness

Today’s lesson is all about learning about facts about mental health conditions. We will spend the lesson reading through some fact sheets on some commonly diagnosed mental health conditions.

Use the handout of fact sheets found in the appendix and read through them with the group members. You can ask the group members what their preference is with regard to reading through the material. The group may decide that they only want to read through a couple of the handouts that apply to their diagnoses. You can also provide group members with copies of the handouts that were not reviewed as a group so that they can read them at their leisure.

Remember, recovery is possible!

No matter when you are diagnosed or what your symptoms are, it’s important to remember that recovery is possible. People can take many paths to recovery. This list is just some examples of what people may choose to help them with their recovery.

* Medication
* Psychotherapy
* Psychosocial rehabilitation
* Yoga
* Meditation
* Acupuncture
* Social clubs

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| Discussion questions:   1. What has been your experience with diagnosis and treatment? 2. What have you found works best for you? 3. Is there anything that you’d like to try to feel better that you haven’t yet tried? 4. Who can you turn to for support while you work on your path to recovery? |

Thanks for participating in today’s session. Our next session will focus on managing symptoms and relapse prevention. See you then!

Lesson Four: Managing Symptoms

Learning objectives:

1. Identify distressing symptoms and ways of managing those symptoms
2. Identify early warning signs to relapse.

People with serious mental health conditions will have good times, when symptoms are managed and they are feeling strong. However, sometimes people experience challenging times or setbacks, when symptoms worsen.

These setbacks are called “relapses” and can often lead to hospitalization or other serious consequences. One of the most common causes of relapse is stopping medication, but relapses can happen even if a person is taking his or her medication as prescribed.

Developing skills and coping mechanisms can help you deal with the everyday challenges of living with a mental health condition.

Some people also experience symptoms all the time, not just when they are under stress. Today’s session is all about symptoms and how we can manage them.

There are several things you can do to manage your symptoms so that you can feel like you are at your best. Here are just a few things to try:

1. **Support**: use your support network to help you manage stress and deal with issues so that you don’t have an increase in symptoms. Some people say they can go for a walk with a friend and talk for a short while to help symptoms pass. Others may find support from others who are also experiencing similar symptoms. Support groups are a good way to meet people and talk about similar experiences and strategies.
2. **Relaxation** **techniques**: people may try different types of relaxation techniques to help them manage their symptoms. These can include deep breathing, visualization and even yoga.
3. **Physical** **activity**: many people say that exercise is one way that helps them to manage their symptoms. Whether it’s taking a walk or running marathons, there are benefits to physical activity. According to some studies, some of the benefits of exercise include reduced stress, an increase in self-confidence and a boost in the chemicals in your brain that make you happy, just to name a few.

Part of knowing what makes you feel better is knowing what makes you feel worse. Some people get anxiety when they are in social situations with lots of other people so they stay away from crowds. You see, each person is different and what triggers one person’s symptoms may not be bothersome to someone else.

Let’s talk about relapse triggers to get an idea of what kinds of situations or behaviors can trigger symptoms.

**Relapse Triggers**

Some situations or behaviors-called triggers-can lead to a relapse. By knowing your triggers, you can develop strategies to deal with them and reduce the risk of relapse. Triggers are different for everyone, but can include:

* Stopping medication or not taking medication as prescribed
* Using drugs or alcohol
* Being under stress or overwhelmed
* Conflict in relationships
* Illness or death of a loved one

Relapse Warning Signs

Although some relapses can happen quickly, many relapses happen gradually, over time. Some signs are subtle and can be hard to notice, while others are more obvious clues that a relapse is coming. By learning to recognize warning signs, you can get help early and avoid a full blown crisis.

Some signs to look for include:

* Too much or too little sleep
* Stopping medication or not taking it regularly
* Feeling tense, nervous, or hostile
* Social withdrawal or isolation
* Decline in personal hygiene
* Increase in paranoia, hallucinations, or hearing voices
* Confusing or nonsensical speech
* False beliefs or delusions (thinking people are against you, being overconfident in your abilities)
* Increase in risk-taking behaviors (spending money, using alcohol/drugs)

Strategies to reduce relapse include:

* Having social support
* Learning about your condition and symptoms
* Participating in supportive treatments and therapies
* Finding a medication option that works for you
* Taking your medications regularly, as prescribed
* Managing stress

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| Activity: Understanding Mental Health Relapse Worksheet  Supplies Needed: Copies of the Understanding Mental Health Relapse Worksheet, pens or pencils  Directions: The purpose of this worksheet is to identify triggers and to find strategies to help you reduce relapse. Answer the questions on the worksheet, and check off the signs that you experience before a relapse. |

Thank you for participating in today’s lesson. Be sure to share the answers to your worksheet with your recovery and support team. And come back for the next lesson, which will focus on alcohol and drugs and mental health.

Lesson Five: Alcohol and Drugs and a Mental Health Condition

Learning objective;

1. Learn about the negative consequences of alcohol and other drugs when you have a mental health condition.

**Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking**

It’s not uncommon for people with mental health conditions to try to cope with their symptoms by smoking or using alcohol and other drugs. While self-medicating may provide temporary distraction from symptoms, they can make recovery even more difficult. Understanding the negative effects of smoking, drinking and taking drugs is the first step in making positive changes. Many people are able to replace substance use with coping strategies that not only help manage their symptoms, but strengthen their overall health.

**Substance Abuse**

About half of people with mental illness abuse alcohol or other substances. People with mental illness may use substances as a way of feeling accepted by peers or altering their moods. The desire to feel better is completely understandable; the paths people take to achieve this are what make the difference.

Substance abuse is when someone has a consistent habit of using a lot of alcohol, prescription or over-the-counter drugs unnecessarily or using illegal drugs. Once people are in the habit of taking drugs, the substances have been shown to change brain chemistry. That can get in the way of your ability to make decisions and can make you crave and seek out substances more. This cycle if it’s not interrupted, can turn into addiction.

Substance abuse is physically dangerous. It can get in the way of your basic functioning, like your ability to socialize, be in good physical health and do your job and in extreme addiction cases, even cause death.

Drug abuse and dependence can negatively affect almost every organ in the body. Drug abuse can lead to:

* Weakened immune system
* Increased risk of heart conditions
* Collapsed veins and infections of the blood vessels and heart valves
* Nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain
* Liver damage or failure
* Seizures, stroke and widespread brain damage
* Death

In addition to creating health challenges, substance abuse can challenge personal relationships and can lead to problems with the law

**Getting Help for Substance Abuse**

Talk to your health care provider about wanting to change your substance use habits. They can help you identify what methods to try and recommend an expert. Integrated care, which addresses your health needs from several angles at once such as psychological and substance related may be an important element of your recovery.

There are many ways to get sober and no one right path. Treatment options include:

* Prescribed drugs to ease withdrawal and reestablish normal functions
* Treatment facilities where you can stay while they help you withdraw
* Outpatient behavioral treatment programs you can visit for help changing your habits
* Social support, like family, friends and community organizations.

**Self-Help and Support Groups**

Self-help groups can be key to recovery. Members of support groups share frustrations, successes, referrals for specialists, where to find the best community resources and tips on what works best when trying to recover. They also form friendships with other members of the group. Here are some groups that can offer support.

* Double trouble in recovery is a twelve-step fellowship for people managing both a mental illness and substance abuse.
* Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are 12 step groups for people recovering from alcohol or drug addiction.
* Smart recovery is a sobriety support group program for people with a variety of addictions.

**Smoking**

People living with mental illness have a very high rate of tobacco use. Research has shown that almost one-half the cigarettes in the US are consumed by people with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders. This means that people with mental illness are about twice as likely to smoke.

There are many reasons why people start, and continue, smoking. It may be common in your social circle, which could be your friends or family. Other people believe that smoking can help them relax.

Whatever the reasons were that attracted you to smoking, there are even better reasons to make the rest of your life smoke-free. Quitting smoking means more time, energy and money to do the things you love the most.

**Benefits to Quitting**

There are immediate and long-term benefits to quitting smoking.

Immediate:

* Your sense of taste and smell improve
* Your breath, hair and clothes smell better
* Your teeth and fingernails stop yellowing
* You save a lot of money
* You have more energy and time available
* You’re better able to socialize with nonsmokers

Long-term:

* Your risk of cancer and heart disease go down
* Your lung function can return to normal
* Your blood circulation improves
* Your blood pressure lowers
* Your lifespan lengthens

Though quitting smoking is hard, it is possible. Nearly 25% of people who try to quit smoking with the help of medicine can stay smoke free for over 6 months. When paired with counseling and other types of emotional support the rates are even higher. The quit rate for people with mental illness is the same for the general population, so everyone has a chance at quitting.

Quitting can take you several tries. Creating new habits isn’t easy, but with time and practice, people do it. To improve your chances of success, work with your health care provider to develop a strategy for how you’ll quit.

**Using Drugs and Alcohol While Taking Medication**

While using drugs and alcohol can have negative effects on your health, they can be even more dangerous when taking psychiatric medications. Drugs that are psychoactive, such as cannabis, alcohol, ecstasy and heroin have the ability to affect your mood. They can arouse certain emotions or dampen down others. This is one reason people use them.

Drugs interfere with the chemicals in your brain. This affects the messages those chemicals are trying to send. You need to weigh up both the short term and long term effects that drugs can have on your mental health. The short term effects may be enjoyable but probably only if they happen like you expect them to. You may also have unwanted short term drug-induced side effects, such as acting or feeling strange. These are short term because they pass as the drug leaves your system.

Drugs can have a longer lasting impact on your mental health too, and you need to think seriously about your own strengths and vulnerabilities. Some people use drugs to make bad feelings go away, however drugs can simply expose bad feelings you never knew you had.

**Effects of Drugs on Mental Health**

All psychoactive drugs may cause problems while you are taking them as the drug leaves your body. These include anxiety, mood swings, depression, sleep problems and psychosis. These can make symptoms of your mental health condition increase or worsen. Some examples of this are mood swings, increased heart rate or panic, delusions (believing things that aren’t true) or hallucinations (seeing things that aren’t there).

It’s common for people who use alcohol and other drugs to also have a mental health diagnosis. If you think you have trouble with alcohol or drug use and want help, please talk to someone in your support network. This could be a close family member or friend, significant other, a therapist or someone from your treatment team or someone in the community that you go to for support like your pastor or someone from your church. People with addiction problems can get help and be healthy! There’s nothing to be ashamed of by asking for help in stopping.

Thank you for participating in today’s lesson. Our next lesson will focus on exploring our own beliefs about taking medication.

Lesson Six: Exploring Personal Beliefs about Medication

Learning objective:

1. Identify and discuss personal beliefs about taking medication

People have different beliefs about whether or not to take medication. Some cultures don’t believe in pharmacy and prefer more natural treatment choices. Some people also struggle with taking medication as prescribed. Think about it. How often are you prescribed an antibiotic for an infection and you stop taking if before you finish the prescription because you feel better? Most of us have done this before. Medications remind people that they’re sick. Who wants to be sick? Other people see medication as “chemicals” or “unnatural.

According to a NY Times article, 20 to 30% of medication prescriptions are never filled and approximately 50% of medications for chronic diseases are not taken as prescribed. People who do take prescription medications, whether it’s for a simple infection or a life threatening condition typically take only about half the prescribed doses.

There are many reasons that people don’t take their prescribed medications. Some reasons include that the prescription is too complicated, they get confused, they don’t have any symptoms, they don’t like the side effects, they can’t pay for them, or they may feel like taking medication is a sign of weakness.

What are your personal beliefs about medication?

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| Activity: Exploring Your Beliefs  Supplies: Copies of the “Exploring Your Beliefs” handout, pens or pencils  Directions: Go through the statements and mark whether you agree or disagree. Share your answers with the group and be sure to discuss your beliefs with the people who are a part of your support network and treatment team. |

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| Activity: Medication Thoughts and Strategies  Supplies: Copies of the “Medication Thoughts and Strategies” handout, pens or pencils  Directions: Write down beliefs you have and consider new ways of thinking about the issue. Share and discuss with group members and your support team. Then, review strategies to help you stay on track with your medication if you choose to take it. Check the strategies you have tried or would like to try. Share and discuss with the group and with your support team. |

While it’s important to understand your own personal beliefs about medication, you may also want to get as much information about the medication you are being prescribed so that you can make an informed decision. It may be helpful to ask your prescriber questions about medication that you are asked to take so that you can have as much information as possible before making a decision about medication. Here are some considerations when using medication.

Using Medication

Your physician may suggest one or more medications to help you feel better. Using these medications should be your decision, but first, you need answers to some important questions. To get those answers, you might ask your doctor or pharmacist, check a book about medications at the library, or search a reliable information source on the internet. Double check with your health care provider before making a final decision.

* What are the common name, product name, product category, and suggested dosage level of this medicine?
* What does the physician expect the medication to do? How long will it take to do that? How well has this medicine worked for other people?
* What are the possible long and short term side effects of taking this medicine? Is there any way to reduce the risk of experiencing these side effects?
* What, if any, restrictions (like driving or avoiding certain foods) need to be considered when using this medicine?
* How are medicine levels in the blood checked? What tests will be needed before taking this medicine and while taking the medicine?
* How do I know if the dose should be changed or the medicine stopped?
* How much does it cost? Are there any programs that would help me cover some or all of the costs of the medications? Is there a less expensive medication that I could use instead? Can generics or non-brand name medications be substituted for any the doctor suggests?
* Are there any medications or supplements that I shouldn’t take at the same time as these? What about over-the-counter medications?

If your symptoms are so bad that you are having trouble understanding this information, ask a family member or friend to learn about the medication and to help you decide whether this is the right course of treatment for you.

In deciding whether to take a medication or have a certain treatment, you might ask yourself whether the benefits of the medication outweigh the risks. You might also decide that you will take it for a trial period and then re-evaluate.

If you decided to use one or more medicines, you must manage them very carefully to get the best possible results and to avoid serious problems. To do this;

* Use the medicines exactly as the doctor and pharmacist have suggested
* Report any side effects to your doctor, and keep notes for yourself about what you experience, when you experience it, and what the doctor’s response is.
* Tell your doctor about any times that you have not been able to take your medicine so that the doctor can tell you what to do-do not double the next dose unless the doctor tells you to.
* Avoid the use of alcohol or illegal drugs (if you are addicted to them, ask your doctor for help)
* Pay close attention to lifestyle issues that cannot be corrected by medications, such as stress, chaos, poor diet (including excessive use of sugar, salt, caffeine, smoking), lack of exercise, light and rest. If these are problems for you, you will need to address these issues at some point in order to feel really well. But take it one step at a time.

Lesson Seven: Information about Medication (how medication works)

Learning objectives:

1. Gain information on how medication works to relieve symptoms.
2. Learn what to expect from your medication

You may be wondering how prescription medication works. Today’s lesson will give you some insight into how the medicine the doctor prescribes works in your body.

Prescription drugs are medicines that are prescribed to a person by his or her doctor to treat diseases. Some prescription drugs affect the brain-especially those used to treat pain, or mental health disorders such as anxiety or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Doctors decide how much of a drug to give a person based on that person’s age, size and medical history. By doing so, doctors oversee the safe and proper use of prescription drugs.

Psychiatric medications influence the brain chemicals that regulate emotions and thought patterns. They’re usually more effective when combined with other forms of rehabilitation and treatment. In some cases, medicines can reduce symptoms so other methods of a treatment plan can be more effective. For example, a medication can ease symptoms of depression like loss of energy and lack of concentration, allowing an individual to engage more in talk therapy.

However, predicting who will respond to what medication can be difficult because different medications work better for one person than for another. Doctors usually review clinical records to see if evidence exists for recommending one medicine over another. They also consider family history and side effects when prescribing medication.

How do medicines work to relieve your symptoms?

Brain chemicals affect the way we think, feel and act. When brain chemicals get out of balance, your brain receives only bits and pieces of information –like pieces of a puzzle. This may cause symptoms of a mental health problem. Medicines work by balancing the chemicals in the brain.

What to expect from your medicine.

Your medicine is designed to help reduce symptoms of a mental health problem. For example, you may be bothered by fears, depression and frightening sights, voices, sounds, thoughts or beliefs. With the right medicine, these symptoms may improve or they may disappear completely. Your thinking may become clearer, so you can concentrate better. You may find it easier to be with other people.

But all of this won’t happen overnight. Treating symptoms such as these take time. Your symptoms will probably improve slowly with the right medication. It may take several weeks or months to figure out what medication works best for you. Finding the right medication or combinations will also take time. To find the right medication, it is very important to work closely with your doctor. This means letting your doctor know about how the medication affects you.

Once you find the medication that works for you it is best to continue taking it. It is important to discuss any changes you want to make with your doctor. Continuing your treatment is one of the most important things you can do to keep your symptoms from returning.

How long a person will need to take medication to manage symptoms depends on each person. It is important to work with your doctor and other mental health professionals to make informed decisions about your medication.

Taking Medication as Prescribed

To figure out what medication works best for you, it is important to take it as prescribed. Here’s why:

* For your medicine to work the right way, there must be enough of it in your system. It your dosage is too low, or if you miss doses, there may not be enough medicine to keep the brain chemicals balanced. Your symptoms may not improve. Or, if they have improved and you stop your medicine, your symptoms could come back again or get worse.
* If your dosage is too high, you may get more side effects from your medicine (but some unwanted effects can happen even at the right dose).
* Some nonprescription medicines can interfere with the prescription medicine(s) you’re taking for your mental health problems. Some can make your illness worse. If you need to take a medicine for another health problem, such as a cold, talk to your doctor or pharmacist first. Your doctor or pharmacist can help you find a medicine that won’t cause problems for you.
* Some people also seek help for symptoms by using remedies common in their culture. This may include herbs, tonics or other remedies. It is important to make sure that everyone providing you with treatment for your mental health problems knows everything that you are taking.

The table below provides you with types of medications used to help people with mental health diagnosis and what the expected benefit is. Please read though it and discuss any questions you may have with your treatment team and/or the people who support you.

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| Kind of medication | Expected benefits |
| Antidepressants | Help reduce the symptoms of depression, including mood, poor appetite, sleep problems, low energy and difficulty concentrating. They can also be helpful in treating anxiety. |
| Mood stabilizers | Help reduce extremes of moods, including mania and depression. |
| Anti-psychotic medication | Help reduce symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized speech or behavior. |
| Anti-anxiety medications | Help reduce anxiety, excessive worry and related sleeping difficulty. |

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| Discussion Questions:   1. What are the pros and cons of taking medication for you? 2. Please share your experiences with medication with the group. |

Lesson Eight: Strategies for Staying on Track

Learning objectives:

1. Learn strategies for getting the best results if you decide to take medication
2. Learn ways of remembering to take medication as prescribed

Many people find that it can be difficult to remember to take medication regularly. There are steps you can take to fit taking medications into your day to day routine. Since everyone has a different routine, it is important to find strategies that work for you.

* **Simplify your medication schedule as much as possible**. Talk to your doctor(s) about making your medication schedule as simple as possible without losing any of the benefits.
* **Take medication at the same time every day.** Taking your medication as the same time (or times) every day makes it easier to remember.
* **Build taking medication into your daily routine**. It is often easier to remember to take medication if it is done with another daily activity, such as brushing your teeth, showering or eating a meal.
* **Use reminders to help yourself remember**. Many people have developed their own reminders to help remember to take their medications regularly such as using a pill container that is organized into daily doses, using a calendar, keeping the pill bottle next to an item that is used daily or asking a relative or another supporter to help them remember. Put your medication into a weekly pill box. It will help you to remember to take your medication and also prevents you from taking double doses.
* **Keep the benefits in mind.** Sometimes it helps to remind yourself of the reasons that you have decided to take medications. As one person put it, “When I start to think that it’s a pain in the neck to keep taking medications, I remind myself why I decided to take them in the first place. I don’t want to get depressed again, and the medication helps me to prevent that.”
* **Create a self-care ritual**. Carve out time in the morning or evening to take your medication while practicing self-care. Drink a cup of tea or read the paper in the morning. Take a walk around the block, meditate, stretch or write for 10-15 minutes before taking your medication.
* **Keep it visible**. As the saying goes “out of sight, out of mind.” Leave your medicine in a place where you will see it so that you remember to take it.

Traveling and Medication

Remembering to take medication as prescribed can be difficult, especially if you are on the move. Whether you take medicine for diabetes, high blood pressure, or a mental health condition, you can have difficulty fitting taking medication as prescribed into your daily routine.

Some of the tips that we just discussed, such as using a pill box and packing it weekly, or using reminders or alarms on your cell phone, can help you to remember to take medications, especially when you are traveling and your daily routine may be disrupted. Here are some additional tips for traveling with medication, regardless of what kind of medication you are taking…

* Keep all of your prescriptions in their original bottles with the prescription labels on them. You can use your pill organizer once you get to where you are going to help you stay on track.
* Pack all of your medication together and keep them with you while you travel. If you are flying, do not put them in your checked baggage. If you’re taking a road trip, make sure to keep your medications in the passenger compartment and not in the trunk so that you can gain easy access to it.
* Always pack a few days extra medication in case you get delayed. This way, you won’t run out of medication while you are traveling.
* You may also consider asking your prescriber for a letter on their letterhead stating that lists the medication you are prescribed and what their purpose is.

|  |
| --- |
| Activity: What works for me? worksheet  Supplies needed: copies of the What works for me? worksheet, pens or pencils  Purpose: to review strategies for remembering medication and discuss options  Directions: Read through each of the proposed strategies for incorporating medication into your daily routine and place a check mark in the column marked “I’ve tried this” or “I am willing to try this”. Discuss your experiences with the rest of the group. |

Lesson Nine: Coping with Side Effects and Reactions

Learning objective:

1. Understand how to recognize side effects and reactions and how to ask for help.

What’s the difference between a reaction, or an adverse effect and side effects?

It’s a common misconception that adverse effects, or reactions, and side effects are the same thing. But they’re not. An adverse event is an undesired event that results from taking medication correctly. Some events or reactions can be expected depending on the medication dose, while others are unpredictable. Those unpredictable reactions are sometimes due to allergies or intolerances. A side effect is an undesired effect that occurs when the medication is taken, regardless of the dosage. Side effects are mostly predictable, or expected and the person taking medication is told to be aware of the effects that could happen while on the medication.

**Medication Side Effects: How to Spot and Manage Them**

Many people take a new medicine and feel just fine. But sometimes medicines cause unintended symptoms that can be bothersome or even difficult to tolerate. If you have this experience, don’t give up! There are many things you can do, and your doctor and pharmacist can help. Being alert to side effects is important!

**When You Get a New Prescription**

**Read the side effects listed on the package insert.** By knowing what the possible side effects are, you can be alert to possible symptoms and be prepared if you notice them. You can also ask your physician about possible side effects when you are discussing your options for medication. Ask questions about what you can expect, how long a side effect may last, and how you can cope with them.

**Follow the directions**. Be sure to read and follow the medicine instructions carefully. If you have any questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

**Check all your medications with your primary care provider or pharmacist.** Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review all the prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, supplements, and herbal remedies you take to be sure the combination or medicines is safe.

**What to Do If You Notice Bothersome Symptoms**

**Discuss your symptoms with your healthcare provider or pharmacist.** There may be simple changes you can make to manage or prevent side effects. Also, sometimes what you think is a side effect may be caused by something other than your medication.

**Don’t stop taking a medicine before discussing it with your doctor, unless you think you are having a serious or life-threatening reaction.** Suddenly stopping a medication may be harmful if the dose is not tapered before discontinuing use.

**Be mindful that side effects may lessen or go away.** As your body adjusts to the new medicine, side effects may disappear. If you are taking a long term medicine, you might notice a difference in 1 to 2 weeks.

**Never use another person’s prescription medicine.** Medicines are prescribed for you because of your unique age, gender and health status, and you may react differently than another person would to the same medicine.

**Tips for Dealing with Specific Side Effects**

* **Nausea or vomiting:** Try taking your medicine with meals. If the medicine is supposed to be taken on an empty stomach, take the medicine before bedtime. If symptoms continue, talk to your doctor.
* **Upset stomach or diarrhea:** You may be able to take another medicine to calm your symptoms. Talk to your doctor about which options are safe to take with your prescription.
* **Constipation:** Try eating more high-fiber foods, drinking more water, or taking a stool softener.
* **Drowsiness or sleeplessness:** If a medicine is making you drowsy, try taking it just before bed. If the medicine is keeping you awake at night and causing restless sleep, try taking it first thing in the morning.
* **Dry mouth or persistent dry cough:** Drinking enough water, chewing sugar-free gum, or sucking on sugar-free hard candy or throat lozenges may help with these bothersome side effects. If you are a smoker, consider quitting smoking.
* **Sexual problems:** Talk to your doctor, there may be another medicine you can take to improve sexual side effects.
* **Mild depression:** Exercising and eating a healthy diet may help boost your mood.

If you do experience side effects from a medication, report them to your doctor. While most of the time side effects are mild, some may be serious and even life threatening. Your doctor will work with you to determine if staying on the medicine, changing the dose, stopping the medicine, or switching to a different medicine might be the best option for you.

Keep track of your medication side effects by using this sheet. You can print a copy and fill it out as you experience side effects. Then you can use it to talk to your support team about side effects.

My Medication Side Effect Tracker <http://healthtools.medbroadcast.com/pdf/Side_effect_tracker.pdf>

It’s not out of the ordinary for people to work with their prescriber to try to find the best medication to treat their symptoms. Sometimes it can take several tries before you and your team find the best fit for you.

|  |
| --- |
| Activity: Watch “My Pill Journey”  Supplies Needed: Laptop and projector with internet access and speakers  Directions: Watch “My Pill Journey” by clicking <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eV1o86_DB8> from [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com). Have a discussion with group participants about their own experiences with trying medication after watching this short video. |

Lesson Ten: Making a Decision about Medicine

Learning objective:

1. Learn how to gather information about the benefits and risks of taking medication for a mental health disorder and work with your support system to make an informed choice.

You may be ambivalent about taking medication for your mental health condition. It’s important to get as much information about your mental health condition, learn about your symptoms, and the treatments available so that you can make a decision based on all of this information. Remember, you are an important member of your recovery team. And you should communicate and partner with the people who support you in this process.

It’s important to know your preferences in relation to your treatment and to be able to communicate those preferences with your support and recovery team. Take a look at this worksheet to help you identify your preferences and make decisions about your wants and needs.

|  |
| --- |
| Activity: Decision Worksheet - Medication  Supplies needed: copies of the “Decision Worksheet-Medication” handout and pens or pencils  Directions: Answer the questions on the handout and discuss your decisions with the group. |

Discussion questions:

1. How comfortable are you discussing your questions and concerns about medication with your support and recovery team?
2. What concerns do you have that are related to talking with your support and recovery team about medication?

Lesson Eleven: Personal Medicine

Learning objective:

1. Gain an understanding of what personal medicine is and how it is integral to recovery.
2. Identify personal medicine

Personal medicine is what we do to be well. It’s the things that put a smile on our face and that make life meaningful. Personal medicine is also the smaller things we do to take care of ourselves and to manage our distress.

People who are in recovery from their mental health condition have learned that psychiatric medicine is not the only type of medicine that is important to recovery. Personal medicine, or those things that raise self-esteem and make life worth living are vital to recovery. Fishing, meditating, exercising, having dinner with a friend, being a good mom, - all of these things and more can be vital to recovery. In other words, personal medicine is all forms of personal wellness strategies and activities that serve to decrease symptoms and increase personal wellness. Please note: personal medicine does not refer to personal concoctions of over the counter medications or herbal remedies or street drugs.

Personal medicine can fall into two broad categories: those activities that give life meaning and purpose, and self-care strategies. Both of these can increase feelings of wellness and decrease psychiatric symptoms. Here are some examples of personal medicine:

* Being a good parent
* Singing in a gospel group
* Helping peers
* Fishing
* Going to school
* Working
* Taking care of a pet
* Cooking for an appreciative spouse

Many people have learned that finding the right balance between personal medicine and psychiatric medicine is the road to recovery.

|  |
| --- |
| Activity: My Personal Medicine Worksheet  Supplies needed: Copies of the My Personal Medicine Worksheet, pens or pencils  Directions: Fill out the worksheet to help you identify your personal medicine and how it helps you. |

Discuss your answers with the group and share why this personal medicine works for you.

Lesson Twelve: Individual Path to Wellness

Learning objective:

1. To put together all of the resources and knowledge gained from the previous sessions to make an plan that describes an individual path to wellness

This group has been all about you! Who are the people that you can work with and confide in while you’re on your path to wellness? Let’s put all of the information we have talked about over the last 11 sessions and create our own personal wellness plan. Feel free to share this plan with the people who are close to you and your recovery team.

|  |
| --- |
| Activity: My Personal Wellness Plan  Supplies Needed: copies of the My Personal Wellness Plan, pens or pencils  Directions: Take some time to fill out your personal wellness plan and share it with the group. Talk with other group members about your choices and why you have decided to make them. |

Facts about Depression

What is Major Depression?

Major depression is a psychiatric disorder in which people feel intense sadness, worthlessness, hopelessness, and helplessness for significant periods of time. These feelings surpass the normal “ups and downs” of everyday life and affect people’s ability to function. Between 10 and 15 percent of people experience major depression at some time in their lives. The disorder is more common in women than in men. The severity of major depression symptoms often varies over time, with episodes of more severe symptoms lasting several weeks or months.

What are Symptoms of Major Depression?

Just like with any mental illness, people with depression experience symptoms differently. But for most people, depression changes how they function day-to-day. Common symptoms of depression include:

* Persistent sad or irritable mood
* Pronounced changes in sleep, appetite, or energy
* Difficulty thinking, concentrating and remembering
* Physical slowing or agitation
* Lack of interest in or pleasure from activities that were once enjoyed
* Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, hopelessness or emptiness
* Physical aches and pains

Causes

Depression does not have a single cause. It can be triggered, or it may occur spontaneously without being associated with a life crisis, physical illness or other risk. Scientists believe several factors contribute to cause depression.

1. Trauma-when people experience trauma at an early age, it can cause long term changes in how their brains respond to fear and stress. These brain changes may explain why people who have a history of childhood trauma are more likely to experience depression.
2. Genetics-mood disorders and risk of suicide tend to run in families, but genetic inheritance is only one factor.
3. Life circumstances-marital status, financial standing and where a person lives have an effect on whether a person develops depression, but it can be a case of “the chicken or the egg.”
4. Brain structure-imaging studies have shown that the frontal lobe of the brain becomes less active when a person is depressed. Depression is also associated with changes in how the pituitary gland and hypothalamus respond to hormone stimulation.
5. Other medical conditions-people who have a history of sleep disturbances, medical illness, chronic pain, anxiety and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are more likely to develop depression.
6. Drug and alcohol use-approximately 30% of people with substance use problems also have depression.

Facts about Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety. However, when feelings of intense fear and distress are overwhelming and prevent us from doing everyday things, an anxiety disorder may be the cause. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the US. An estimated 40 million adults in the US, or 18%, have an anxiety disorder. Approximately 8% of children and teenagers experience the negative impact of an anxiety disorder at school and at home.

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Just like with any mental illness, people with anxiety disorders experience symptoms differently. But for most people, anxiety changes how they function day-to-day. People can experience one or more of the following symptoms:

Emotional Symptoms

* Feelings of apprehension or dread
* Feeling tense and jumpy
* Restlessness or irritability
* Anticipating the worst and being watchful for signs of danger

Physical symptoms

* Pounding or racing heart and shortness of breath
* Upset stomach
* Sweating, tremors and twitches
* Headaches, fatigue and insomnia
* Upset stomach, frequent urination or diarrhea

Types of Anxiety Disorders:

Different anxiety disorders have various symptoms. This also means that each type of anxiety disorder has its own treatment plan. The most common anxiety disorders include:

* Panic Disorder; characterized by panic attacks-sudden feelings of terror-sometimes striking repeatedly and without warning. Often mistaken for a heart attack, a panic attack causes powerful, physical symptoms including chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath and stomach upset.
* Phobias: Most people with specific phobias have several triggers. To avoid panicking, someone with specific phobias will work hard to avoid their triggers, depending on the type and number of triggers, this fear and the attempt to control it can seem to take over a person’s life.
* Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD): GAD produces chronic, exaggerated worrying about everyday life. This can consume hours each day, making it hard to concentrate or finish routing daily tasks. A person with GAD may become exhausted by worry and experience headaches, tension or nausea.
* Social Anxiety Disorder: Unlike shyness, this disorder causes intense fear, often driven by irrational worries about social humiliation-“saying something stupid” or “not knowing what to say.” Someone with social anxiety disorder may not contribute to class discussions, or offer their ideas, and may become isolated. Panic attack symptoms are a common reaction.

Causes

Scientists believe that many factors combine to cause anxiety disorders.

Genetics: Some families will have a higher than average numbers of members experiencing anxiety issues, and studies support the evidence that anxiety disorders run in families. This can be a factor in someone developing an anxiety disorder.

Stress: A stressful or traumatic situation such as abuse, death of a loved one, violence or prolonged illness is often linked to the development of an anxiety disorder.

Facts about Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a chronic mental illness that causes dramatic shifts in a person’s mood, energy and ability to think clearly. People with bipolar disorder have high and low moods, known as mania and depression, which differ from the typical ups and downs that most people experience. If left untreated, the symptoms usually get worse. However, with a strong lifestyle that includes self-management and a good treatment plan, many people live well with the condition.

Although bipolar disorder can occur at any point in life, the average age of onset is 25. Every year, 2.9% of the US population is diagnosed with bipolar disorder, with nearly 83% being classified as severe. Bipolar disorder affects men and women equally.

What are the symptoms of bipolar disorder?

A person with bipolar disorder may have distinct manic or depressed states. Severe bipolar episodes of mania or depression may also include psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions. Usually, these psychotic symptoms mirror a person’s extreme mood.

**Mania**: To be diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a person must have experienced mania or hypomania. Hypomania is a milder form of mania that doesn’t include psychotic episodes. People with hypomania can often function normally in social situations or at work. Some people with bipolar disorder will have episodes of mania or hypomania many times; others may experience them only rarely.

Although people with bipolar may find an elevated mood very appealing-especially if it occurs after depression-the “high” doesn’t stop at a comfortable or controllable level. Moods can rapidly become more irritable, behavior more unpredictable, and judgement more impaired. During periods of mania, people frequently behave impulsively, make reckless decisions and take unusual risks. Most of the time, people in manic states are unaware of the negative consequences of their actions.

**Depression:** Depression produces a combination of physical and emotional symptoms that inhibit a person’s ability to function nearly every day for a period of at least two weeks. The level of depression can range from severe to moderate to mild low mood, which is called dysthymia when it is chronic.

Causes

Scientists have not discovered a single cause of bipolar disorder. They believe several factors may contribute.

Genetics: The chances of developing bipolar disorder are increased if a child’s parents or siblings have the disorder, but the role of genetics is not absolute.

Stress: A stressful event such as a death in a family, an illness, a difficult relationship or financial problems can trigger the first bipolar episode. In some cases, drug abuse can trigger bipolar disorder.

**Brain structure:** Brain scans cannot diagnose bipolar disorder in an individual. However, researchers have identified subtle differences in the average size or activation in some brain structures of people with bipolar disorder. While brain structure alone may not cause it, there are some conditions in which damaged brain tissue can predispose a person.

Facts about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Traumatic events, such as military combat, assault, an accident or a natural disaster, can have long-lasting negative effects. Sometimes our biological responses and instincts, which can be life-saving during a crisis, leave people with ongoing psychological symptoms because they are not integrated into consciousness.

PTSD affects 3.5% of the US adult population-about 7.7 million Americans-but women are more likely to develop the condition than men. About 37% of those cases are classified as severe. While PTSD can occur at any age, the average age of onset is in a person’s early 20’s.

What are the symptoms of PTSD?

Symptoms of PTSD fall into the following categories:

* Intrusive memories, which can include flashbacks of reliving he moment of trauma, bad dreams and scary thoughts.
* Avoidance, which can include staying away from certain places or objects that are reminders of the traumatic event. A person may also feel numb, guilty, worried or depressed or having trouble remembering the traumatic event.
* Dissociation, which can include out-of-body experiences or feeling that the world is “not real” (derealization).
* Hypervigilance, which can include being startled very easily, feeling tense, trouble sleeping or outbursts of anger.

Facts about Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that interferes with a person’s ability to think clearly, manage emotions, make decisions and relate to others. It is a complex, long-term medical illness, affecting about 1% of Americans. Although schizophrenia can occur at any age, the average age of onset tends to be in the late teens to the early twenties for men, and the late twenties to early thirties for women. It is uncommon for schizophrenia to be diagnosed in a person younger than 12 or older than 40.

What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?

Just like with any mental illness, people with schizophrenia experience symptoms differently. Symptoms include:

* Hallucinations, which can include a person hearing voices, seeing things, or smelling things others can’t perceive.
* Delusions, which are false beliefs that don’t change even when the person who holds them is presented with new ideas or facts.
* Disorganized thinking, such as struggling to remember things, organize thoughts or complete tasks.
* Anosognosia, which means they are unaware that they have an illness.
* Negative symptoms, such as being emotionally flat or speaking in a dull, disconnected way.

Causes

Research suggests that schizophrenia may have several possible causes:

* Genetics. Schizophrenia isn’t caused by just one genetic variation, but a complex interplay of genetics and environmental influences. While schizophrenia occurs in 1% of the general population, having a history of family psychosis greatly increases the risk. Schizophrenia occurs at roughly 10% of people who have a first-degree relative with the disorder, such as a parent or sibling.
* Environment. Exposure to viruses or malnutrition before birth, particularly in the first and second trimesters has been shown to increase the risk of schizophrenia.
* Brain chemistry. Problems with certain brain chemicals, including neurotransmitters called dopamine and glutamate, may contribute to schizophrenia. Neurotransmitters allow brain cells to communicate with each other. Networks of neurons are likely involved as well.
* Drug Use. Some studies have suggested that taking mind-altering drugs during teen years and young adulthood can increase the risk of schizophrenia. A growing body of evidence indicates that smoking marijuana increases the risk of psychotic incidents and the risk of ongoing psychotic experiences. The younger and more frequent the use, the greater the risk. Another study has found that smoking marijuana led to earlier onset of schizophrenia and often preceded the manifestation of the illness.

Facts about Schizoaffective Disorder

Schizoaffective disorder is a chronic mental health condition characterized primarily by symptoms of schizophrenia, such as hallucinations or delusions, and symptoms of a mood disorder, such as mania and depression. Many people with schizoaffective disorder are often incorrectly diagnosed at first wit bipolar disorder or schizophrenia because it shares symptoms of multiple mental health conditions.

Schizoaffective disorder is seen in about 0.3% of the population. Men and women experience schizoaffective disorder at the same rate, but men often develop the illness at an earlier age.

What are the symptoms of schizoaffective disorder?

Just like with any mental illness, people with schizoaffective disorder experience symptoms differently. Depending on the type of mood disorder diagnosed, people will experience different symptoms:

* Hallucinations, which can include a person hearing voices, seeing things or smelling things others can’t perceive.
* Delusions, which are false beliefs that don’t change even when the person who holds them is presented with new ideas or facts.
* Disorganized thinking, which is difficulty concentrating and/or following instructions, difficulty completing tasks, memory problems.
* Depressed mood, which is feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.
* Manic behavior, which means behaving impulsively, making reckless decisions and taking unusual risks. Most of the time, people in manic states are unaware of the negative consequences of their actions

Understanding Mental Health Relapse Worksheet

Use this worksheet to take control of your recovery journey. By preparing when you are feeling well, you may be able to reduce the possibility of a relapse. Share this with our treatment team and support network and create a relapse plan together.

**Monitoring Symptoms**

Sometimes, your regular symptoms may become more severe, increase in frequency, or last longer. This can be the beginning of a relapse.

Ask yourself these questions:

What symptoms do I have more often than usual when experiencing a relapse?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Which symptoms get stronger and more difficult to ignore when I am experiencing a relapse? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What symptoms last longer than usual when I am experiencing a relapse? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Recognizing Early Signs of Relapse**

Many relapses occur gradually, with changes in behavior called warning signs. By learning to recognize your warning signs, you can get help early and avoid a more serious setback.

Check off signs that you have experienced before a relapse:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Too much or too little sleep |
|  | Feeling tense, nervous, hostile |
|  | Increase in paranoia, hallucinations, hearing voices, or risk-taking behaviors (spending money, using alcohol/drugs) |
|  | Confusing or nonsensical speech |
|  | Stopping medication or not taking it regularly |
|  | Social withdrawal or isolation |
|  | False beliefs or delusions (people are against you, overconfident in your abilities) |
|  | Change in personal hygiene |
|  | Other: |
|  | Other: |

**Identifying Triggers**

Triggers are situations or behaviors that can lead to a relapse and are different for everyone. A common cause of relapse is stopping medication; however, relapses can happen even when a person is taking his or her medication as prescribed.

Difficult life events, like losing a family member, can be stressful. But it is important to know that even positive life events-like getting a new job or starting a new relationship-can also be stressful.

Check the situations that may be triggers for you.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Moving to a new apartment/house |
|  | Starting a new job or relationship |
|  | Being fired from a job |
|  | Being invited to a party |
|  | Stopping medication altogether |
|  | Having difficulty taking medication, as prescribed |
|  | Having money problems |
|  | Using drugs and alcohol |
|  | Having an illness or death in the family |
|  | Fighting with a friend or family member |
|  | Being bored during the day |
|  | Other: |
|  | Other: |

**Strategies to Reduce Relapse**

During periods of stress or change, you may stop doing things that help you stay healthy. Make a list of activities that help you stay well.

Check the activities that can help you stay healthy.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Find activities that reduce stress (listening to music, breathing exercises, meditation) |
|  | Go to my appointments regularly |
|  | Be involved in making decisions about my medications and supportive treatments |
|  | Take medication regularly, as prescribed |
|  | Use supportive treatments and services (psychotherapy or peer counseling) |
|  | Get support from my family, friends or treatment team |
|  | Exercise (walking, gym, yoga) |
|  | Other: |
|  | Other: |

Source: http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/sites/default/files/Worksheet\_12\_UnderstandingMentalHealthRelapse.pdf

Exploring Your Beliefs

Directions: Think about your personal beliefs (positive and negative) about medication. These beliefs can be influenced by things like family, culture, and personal experience. It can help to be aware of and understand your beliefs.

Go through the statements below and mark whether you agree or disagree. Share your answers with the group and talk them through with members of your support and treatment team.



|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| STATEMENT | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| I understand how medication is likely to help me. |  |  |
| I don’t need to take medication once I feel better. |  |  |
| For me, the good things about medication outweigh the bad. |  |  |
| I am worried about the impact of side effects. |  |  |
| In my culture, taking medication is frowned upon. |  |  |
| Medications have not helped me in the past. |  |  |
| It is too hard to remember to take all my medications. |  |  |
| When my family, loved ones, or members of my treatment team want to be involved in my medication, it’s because they are concerned about me. |  |  |
| I don’t need medication to deal with my mental health condition. |  |  |
| Medication can help me achieve my goals. |  |  |
| It is embarrassing to take medication. |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |

<http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/sites/default/files/Worksheet_7_ExploringYourBeliefsAboutMedication.pdf>

Medication Thoughts and Strategies

**It may be helpful to talk to your doctor or other treatment team members about the way you think about medication. Write down beliefs you have and consider new ways of thinking about the issue. If helpful, go through the worksheet with a member of your support team.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Belief About Medication** | **Possible New Thoughts** | Who Can Help? |
| Example: It is hard to remember to take all my medications. | I can set an alarm on my phone or in my calendar to help me remember.  I can simplify my medication schedule. | My doctor |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Below are strategies to help you stay on track with your medication, so you can get the best results. Check the strategies you have tried or would like to try.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Strategy** | **I Have Used This Strategy** | **I Want to Try This Strategy** |
| Simplify your medication schedule. |  |  |
| Talk to your doctor about medication options with less frequent dosing schedules. |  |  |
| Schedule medication into your daily routine. |  |  |
| Think about the benefits of medication. |  |  |
| Use cues and reminders (notes, alarms, calendars, computer/phone apps). |  |  |
| Ask people in your support network for help remembering. |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |

<http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/sites/default/files/Worksheet_8_MedicationThoughtsandStrategies.pdf>

What Works for Me?

Directions: Read through the list below and place a check mark in the column if you have tried this technique for optimizing your medication routine in the past or would like to try it. Discuss your answers with the group.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Technique | I have tried this in the past | I would like to try this |
| Simplify your medication schedule |  |  |
| Take meds at the same time everyday |  |  |
| Build taking meds into your daily routine |  |  |
| Use reminders to help yourself remember |  |  |
| Keep the benefits in mind |  |  |
| Create a self-care ritual |  |  |
| Keep it visible |  |  |

Decision Worksheet: Medication

Use this worksheet to begin a conversation with your support and recovery team about your preferences and to make an informed decision that is best for your needs.

Decision: What am I facing? Choosing a medication

Whom do I want to participate in this decision?

\_\_\_\_ Me \_\_\_\_My doctor \_\_\_\_My therapist

\_\_\_\_Family member/friend \_\_\_\_My social worker/case worker \_\_\_\_Other:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ My family member/partner/spouse/friend Other:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Values and Preferences

Think about your medical history, experiences with medication, and what your values and preferences are around this topic. It may be helpful for you to think back to the other exercises we have completed in this group. Make sure to share these with your doctor and members of your support and recovery team.

What is important to me (my values), and what are my experiences?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What are my options?

With the help of your support and recovery team, you can gather information and come up with a list of options that are available to you.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | NAME | PURPOSE |
| MEDICATION A |  |  |
| MEDICATION B |  |  |
| MEDICATION C |  |  |

PROS and CONS

Work with your support network to make an informed decision. Together, you can list the pros and cons based on your preferences and weigh your options. Use stars (\*) to show how important the pro or con is to you. Five stars (\*\*\*\*\*) means it matters “a lot.” No stars means “not at all.”

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| MEDICATION A | | | |
| + PROS | How much it matters | -CONS | How much it matters |
|  |  |  |  |
| MEDICATION B | | | |
| + PROS | How much it matters | -CONS | How much it matters |
|  |  |  |  |
| MEDICATION C | | | |
| + PROS | How much it matters | -CONS | How much it matters |
|  |  |  |  |

Now it’s time to make a decision.

Which option do you prefer?

\_\_\_\_option A \_\_\_\_option B \_\_\_\_option C \_\_\_\_unsure

Which option does my doctor prefer?

\_\_\_\_option A \_\_\_\_option B \_\_\_\_option C \_\_\_\_unsure

Are my doctor and I in agreement with the decision?

\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_no

[www.choicesinrecovery.com](http://www.choicesinrecovery.com)

Personal Medicine Worksheet

Personal medicine is an activity someone does because it helps them feel better or increases their “wellness”. Personal medicine can be things like: working as a carpenter, being a good parent to my 3 year old daughter, and vegetable gardening.

When we talk about personal medicine, we are not talking about psychiatric medicine prescribed by a doctor and we are not talking about over-the-counter pills, vitamins, herbal remedies or street drugs. Personal medicine is about thinks you do, not something you take. Personal medicine is personal. It’s the thing you do that helps you feel good about yourself and your life. Just like mental health medicine, personal medicine has an active ingredient-the thing that makes it work for you. For example, a walk in the park may help you feel connected to nature and improve your mood-so, walking in the park is personal medicine and connecting with nature and improved mood is how it helps (active ingredient). This worksheet is intended to help you identify your personal medicine and how it helps. Fill in the chart below with activities that work for you. Read the example below and fill in your answers.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Personal Medicine | | Active Ingredient  (How does it help?) | Top 3 I Will Share With Doctor |
| Ex: Something I do to feel better | Walking in the park | Connects me with nature and improves my mood | X |
| Something I do to feel better |  |  |  |
| Something I do that makes my life meaningful |  |  |  |
| Something I do that helps me feel good about being me |  |  |  |
| Something I enjoy doing on a daily basis |  |  |  |
| Something I do that helps me when I feel bad |  |  |  |
| The most important thing in my life is |  |  |  |

Finally, from the list above, mark off the three items that are most important to you. Share these with your doctor at your next medication appointment. Knowing what you do to be well should help you and your doctor find the right balance of personal medicine and mental health medicine for your recovery.

1. Does your personal medicine help you be well and strengthen your recovery? \_\_Y \_\_N
2. Is your personal medicine something you do NOW in your life? \_\_\_Y \_\_\_N
3. Is your personal medicine an activity, not a feeling or state of mind? \_\_\_Y \_\_\_N
4. Is your personal medicine something you DO, not something you take? \_\_\_Y \_\_\_N
5. Does your personal medicine say unique about you? \_\_\_Y \_\_\_N

*If you answered “no” to any of these questions, revise your personal medicine so it will be more effective.*

https://www.cibhs.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/3.\_personal\_medicine\_worksheet.pdf

My Personal Wellness Plan

Directions: Complete the personal wellness plan below and share why you made your choices with the rest of the group.

1. What do you have or do in your life that helps you to stay well? (people, places and things)
2. What are some things you don’t do now but could do regularly to help you feel well? Some examples include exercise, getting a good night’s sleep, eating healthy foods)
3. What are important symptoms for you to watch out for?
4. What are some things that you can do to help you avoid an increase in symptoms?
5. What are some things you can do when you start to experience an increase in symptoms?
6. Who are the important people that make up your recovery and support team? What roles do each of these people play in your life? In other words, how do they support your recovery?
7. What are your preferences with regards to medication? Who will you share these preferences with so that they can support you in your recovery?
8. Finally, list some of your personal medicine.

Resources

Adverse Effects vs Reactions <http://www.pharmacytimes.com/contributor/shelby-leheny-pharmd-candidate-2017/2017/02/adverse-event-not-the-same-as-side-effect>

Exploring your Beliefs <http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/sites/default/files/Worksheet_7_ExploringYourBeliefsAboutMedication.pdf>

Facts about Depression <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Images/FactSheets/Depression-FS.pdf>

Facts about Anxiety <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Images/FactSheets/Anxiety-Disorders-FS.pdf>

Alcohol, Drugs and Smoking <https://www.nami.org/find-support/living-with-a-mental-health-condition/taking-care-of-your-body/drugs,-alcohol-smoking>

Facts about Bipolar disorder <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Images/FactSheets/Bipolar-Disorder-FS.pdf>

Facts about PTSD <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Images/FactSheets/PTSD-FS.pdf>

Facts about Schizophrenia <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Images/FactSheets/Schizophrenia-FS.pdf>

Facts about Schizoaffective Disorder <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Images/FactSheets/Schizophrenia-FS.pdf>

Facts about Medication <https://rfmh.csod.com/clientimg/rfmh/KB/NYS-WSM-New%20Workbook_20110719v7_635310072612022028.pdf>

Four dimensions of wellness <https://www.samhsa.gov/recovery>

Life in Recovery fact sheet <https://www.memorialbehavioralhealth.org/Portals/12/PDF/MBH-Health-and-Wellness/Life-in-Recovery-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Living with a mental health condition <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Living-with-a-Mental-Health-Condition>

Living with a mental health condition <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/recognizing-warning-signs>

Living with a mental health condition <https://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/mental-disorders>

Medication decision worksheet <http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/sites/default/files/CIR_MakingDecisionsTogether_Workbook.pdf>

Medications for treating mental health disorders <https://www.nami.org/learn-more/treatment/mental-health-medications>

Medication side effects <https://www.riteaid.com/shop/info/wellness-plus/programs/articles/medication-side-effects>

Medication Thoughts and Strategies <http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/sites/default/files/Worksheet_8_MedicationThoughtsandStrategies.pdf>

My Medication Side Effect Tracker <http://healthtools.medbroadcast.com/pdf/Side_effect_tracker.pdf>

My Pill Journey <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eV1o86_DB8>

Personal Medicine <https://www.patdeegan.com/commonground/tour/personal-medicine>

Personal Medicine <https://www.patdeegan.com/blog/posts/importance-personal-medicine>

Personal Medicine Worksheet <https://www.cibhs.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/3._personal_medicine_worksheet.pdf>

Positive Factors in Promoting Recovery <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/sites/default/files/images/family_toolkit_m2.pdf>

Recovering your Mental Health-A Self-Help Guide <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA-3504/SMA-3504.pdf>

Recovery is possible <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/recovery-journey>

Recovery is possible <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/recovery-possible>

Remembering to Take Medicine <https://psychcentral.com/blog/8-simple-ideas-for-remembering-to-take-your-medication/>

Traveling with Medication <https://www.tripsavvy.com/tips-for-traveling-with-prescription-drugs-2972759>

“The Cost of Not Taking Your Medicine” <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/well/the-cost-of-not-taking-your-medicine.html>

Understanding mental health relapse <http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/strategies-for-success/mental-health-relapse.html>

Understanding mental health relapse worksheet <http://www.choicesinrecovery.com/sites/default/files/Worksheet_12_UnderstandingMentalHealthRelapse.pdf>

Using drugs and mental health <http://www.drugs.ie/drugs_info/about_drugs/mental_health/>

Wellness Self-Management workbook WSM\_Workbook\_English\_2011.01.22.v10.pdf