

Neuromuscular Disease and Your Mental Health

Mental health includes your emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how you feel, think, and act, and it can be associated with how you handle stress, relate to others, and make choices in your life. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Why should you take care of your mental health?



- ▶ Mental health challenges can cause barriers to getting the care you need if they are neglected or poorly managed.
- ▶ Research studies show poor mental health can worsen risks for and symptoms of medical conditions such as stroke, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.
- ▶ Good mental health can improve physical health and well-being, relationships, and quality of life.

How can a neuromuscular disease impact mental health?

Being diagnosed and living with a neuromuscular disease affects many aspects of life. These factors can impact mental health:

Medical/physical impacts

- Specifics of the diagnosis
- Chronic or progressive nature of the condition
- Symptom management
- Care needs along the continuum

Psychosocial impacts

- Dependency
- Socialization
- Finances
- Access to care
- Quality of life
- Sense of purpose

Cognitive impacts

- Cognitive changes as an effect of the disease, including difficulty with communication or memory
- Irritability
- Personality changes
- Excessive sleepiness

Psychological changes

- Emotions
- Coping
- Self-image
- Motivation
- Thought patterns



According to a 2018 neuromuscular healthcare partnerships survey, **75% of patients** experience psychological symptoms.

Helpful tips for your mental health

- ▶ Make your mental health a priority.
- ▶ If you feel you are in danger of harming yourself, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800-273-8255**, or dial **911**.
- ▶ Learn ways to identify, acknowledge, and release negative emotions; control negative thinking; and build on positive emotions.
- ▶ Identify stressors, and explore what you can do to manage them effectively.
- ▶ If you struggle with coping skills, seek resources to learn new ways to cope.
- ▶ Seek outside support (from friends and family or from a professional therapist) if you are struggling emotionally.



How to take care of your mental health

- ▶ Make time for movement and exercise. For example, try modified yoga or aquatic therapy.
- ▶ Get outdoors and connect with nature.
- ▶ Journal by writing or dictating your thoughts and feelings.
- ▶ Do more of what you enjoy, whether that's arts and crafts, listening to music, or watching movies.
- ▶ Get enough sleep.
- ▶ Eat nutritious foods.
- ▶ Consciously practice appreciation and gratitude.
- ▶ Connect with others and create a social support network.
- ▶ Learn breathing exercises and relaxation techniques.
- ▶ Meditate and practice mindfulness.
- ▶ Visit a therapist or counselor. They may prescribe medications, if necessary.



"Patients with muscular dystrophy are commonly afflicted with psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, cognitive deficits, etc., ... which likely exacerbate disease progression and worsen quality of life."
—*Frontiers in Physiology, 2014*

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. You may not have control over what is happening, but you do have control over how you respond to it.



Check your mental health

To gauge the state of your mental health, ask yourself these questions. If your answers reveal a number of negative feelings, it may be time to talk with your healthcare provider or a therapist.

1. How would you describe your mood?
2. How would you rate your overall mood on a scale of 0-10? How do you think others would rate you?
3. Do you typically wake up looking forward to or dreading the day?
4. Do you ever think about hurting yourself?
5. How do you cope with stress or adversity?
6. Do you talk about your feelings?
7. Are your thoughts mostly positive or mostly negative?
8. Do you complain more or appreciate more?
9. Do you feel depressed or anxious?
10. What do you do to take care of your mental health?

For more information and resources on mental health and neuromuscular disease, visit mda.org/mental-health.



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