

Supporting your
mental health and
well-being





It's not always easy to recognize that you might need help with your mental health. And it can be just as challenging to know how to access the help you need. In this guide, we'll help you:

1. Answer the following questions:

- How do I know if I need mental health support?
- Where can I go to get mental health support?
- Which type of treatment will help me?

2. Understand mental health and the resources available to you:

- Mental health, the mental health continuum and the biopsychosocial model
- Keeping myself mentally healthy
- Mental health and wellness benefits coverage in my plan
- Supporting the mental health of my dependents
- Contact information and resources for immediate support

What is mental health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and physical health. It affects our ability to function, relate to others, engage in activities we enjoy, bounce back from challenges, and continue to move forward.

Mental health continuum

Our mental health shifts over the course of our lifetime. It never stays the same. Which is why it's easier to think of it as a continuum or sliding scale. Depending on the challenges we're facing, there are times we'll move towards one end of the scale or the other.

Biopsychosocial model

Today, most medical professionals believe three factors affect our mental health. These three factors make up what they call the biopsychosocial model.

Biopsychosocial is a technical way of saying we're all impacted by our biology, social experiences, and psychology.¹

Biology

Our genetics and brain chemistry

Psychology

How we perceive things and interpret events

Social experiences

Early life experiences, family relationships and life traumas

This model shows our mental health is made up of many factors. These factors may influence us individually, at different times, or they can sometimes influence us all at once. That's why mental health can be a complex topic to understand.

Keeping myself mentally healthy



It's ok to not feel ok. *The more we normalize conversations about mental health and mental illness, the easier it will be for family, friends, colleagues, and even for ourselves, to get the support we need.*

Engaging in self-care and prevention is a great way to help keep ourselves mentally healthy.

Some of these activities include:

- Healthy eating habits
- Daily exercise
- Getting enough sleep
- Staying connected with family and friends
- Participating in social activities
- Spending time outdoors
- Being aware of how we're using substances like alcohol or drugs
- Practicing self-care
- Limiting screen time and exposure to negative stimuli
- Asking for help or advice

Including some of these habits in our daily lives can help us gain confidence, boost positive feelings, form deeper connections, and cope with tough situations.

How do I know if I need mental health support?

Being attentive and proactive with our mental health is important. We need to take care of it the same way we take care of our physical health.

Let's go back to the biopsychosocial model. Changes in any of these areas may signal you need support.

- **Bio:** a change to your physical state – are you sleeping less, or feeling less rested?
- **Psycho:** a change in mood – are you increasingly irritable and feeling less able to cope with everyday challenges?
- **Social:** how you interact with others – are you withdrawn/anxious in social situations?

Everyone has stressful moments and can feel sad sometimes. Changes that persist for two weeks or more may be cause for concern.² **Some of these changes can include:**

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Constant worry
- Relationship conflicts
- Too much or too little sleep
- Loss of appetite or eating too much
- Substance use
- Irritability
- Loss of interest in activities, and more

You can always start with a mental health assessment if you have concerns. [Here are some free online tools that can help.](#)

Where can I go to get mental health support?

Many people avoid getting the help they need because they're concerned about what others may think of them. Don't let this hold you back from seeking support. Speak to a friend, a family member, or your doctor for help.

If you notice changes to your mood, behaviour, or productivity that aren't going away, the best place to start is with your family doctor.

Your family doctor can rule out an underlying physical health condition, since sometimes physical health conditions can affect our mental health – for example, an underactive thyroid. They can also connect you with the proper resources and/or a course of action to support your mental health journey.



Which type of treatment will help me?

You need to understand your needs before you can choose the best way to address them. That's why it's a good idea to connect with your family doctor as your first step. If you do decide to see a mental health professional, there are several types you can choose from.

- Psychiatrists
- Psychologists
- Social workers
- Occupational therapists
- Psychotherapists and mental health counsellors

[Click here](#) to learn about choosing the right mental health professional for you.³ You can also read up on the different types of therapy [here](#).

Mental health and wellness benefits coverage in my plan

Your benefits plan may have access to mental health support and wellness programs.

- **Coverage for mental health practitioners:** this includes coverage for sessions with a variety of licensed mental health professionals including psychologists, social workers and/or psychotherapists.
- **Virtual Care:** a virtual walk-in service that quickly assesses medical issues and mental health questions. Some also have targeted programs for mental health.
- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** offers a broad range of plan member support in work and life areas.
- **Coaching support for mental health:** engages plan members who are the most at risk for developing mental health concerns.

You can check your coverage on [mysunlife.ca](#), the **my Sun Life mobile app**, or in your benefits booklet.

Lumino Health

[Lumino Health](#) makes it easy for you to access the tools and resources you need to support your health and well-being.

With Lumino Health, you can:

- find and book appointments with mental health professionals, and
- get access to tips, tools, and expert advice.



Supporting the mental health of my dependents

Navigating mental health issues for a loved one can be challenging. It's important to look for signs that they might need support (see section above: How do I know if I need mental health support?). Have your dependents speak to their family doctor if they have mental health concerns.

Here are some helpful tips for supporting someone in your circle of care with mental illness:

- **Education:** seek out information from reliable sources to learn more about mental health and illness.
- **Listening:** sometimes listening without feeling pressure to offer a solution is a powerful source of support and reassurance.
- **Look after yourself:** having your own therapist or someone to talk to is important when supporting someone else.
- **Advocate for resources and support:** you may have to educate others on the mental health needs of your dependent.
- **Connect your dependent to support:** start with your family doctor when looking for the appropriate care for your dependent.

Read this helpful [Lumino Health article](#) to learn more on this subject.



Contact information and resources for immediate support

- [Talk Suicide Canada](#): 1-833-456-4566 (available 24/7) or text 45645 (4 p.m.–midnight ET).
- [Suicide.ca](#): 1-866 APPELLE (1-866-277-3553) or text 535353
- [Suicide Prevention Centre of Montreal](#): 1-866-277-3553 (available 24/7) or text 535353
- [Hope for Wellness Helpline - support for Indigenous people across Canada](#): 1-855-242-3310 (available 24/7)
- National Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419
- [Trans Lifeline Canada](#): 1-877-330-6366
- [Kids Help Phone](#)



If you or someone you know is in crisis

If you or someone you know is at immediate risk of self-harm or suicide, call 911.

It's always better to over-react to a potential risk of suicide than to under-react.

Recognizing you need mental health support isn't easy; neither is knowing how and where to get the help you need. We hope this guide will make it easier for you and your family to know where to begin on your mental health journey.

It's time to change the conversation. Mental health disorders and illnesses are medical conditions. And those who are affected deserve compassion, our understanding, and access to the support and care they need. —Carmen Bellows, Registered Psychologist, Director, Mental Health Solutions, at Sun Life

¹Sun Life. Understanding the truth about mental health video.

²Dr. Sam Mikail. Do I need therapy? 11 signs it's time to seek help, Lumino Health.

³Lumino Health infographic, Choose the right therapist for you.