

Choosing a Psychiatrist

Gloom that never seems to lift. Overwhelming feelings of dread. Thoughts of suicide. "Voices" whispering strange and confusing commands. Out-of-control drinking or drug use.

The reasons to seek psychiatric help are many. The causes of these symptoms can be just as numerous, however, no mental illness diagnosis should be considered without a thorough examination. But when it's time to get help, an important first step in the treatment process is finding a psychiatrist who's right for you.



What Is a Psychiatrist?

A psychiatrist is a medical physician who specializes in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses, including substance abuse and addiction. Psychiatrists are uniquely qualified to assess both the mental and physical aspects of psychological disturbance. Their medical education has given them a full working knowledge of the many causes for a patient's feelings and symptoms. Armed with this understanding, psychiatrists can make a complete, accurate diagnosis and then recommend or provide treatment.



Some Warning Signs of Mental Illness

- Marked personality change
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Strange ideas or delusions
- Excessive anxiety
- Prolonged feelings of sadness
- Marked changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Thinking or talking about suicide
- Extreme highs and lows
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Excessive anger, hostility
- Violent behavior
- Irrational fears



Mission Statement

As women of today we want to improve the lives of women of tomorrow by increasing awareness and knowledge of mental health issues. We wish to remove the stigma of mental illness by educating the public. It is also our goal to empower women through increased awareness of mental health issues and encourage a holistic approach to mental health care which acknowledges everyone's physical, mental, and spiritual needs.

To Become A Member

For information and to receive a membership brochure, please call Linda Jones at 858-514-5153, or visit our website at www.vistahill.org.

Just Between Friends is published twice a year by the Friends of Vista Hill Foundation, 8787 Complex Drive, Suite 200, San Diego, CA 92123

The Vista Hill Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit system dedicated to providing excellence in behavioral health care for the people of San Diego County.



Membership BENEFITS

All memberships are renewable on a yearly basis. Enjoy WC programs at a reduced rate and support Vista Hill. Join today!

\$50 Ruby Level

- 20% discount on tickets to Women's Council on Mental health programs and Q&A forums featuring nationally-recognized experts, authors and celebrities
- Subscription to bi-annual newsletter
- A distinctive and elegant goldtone membership pin

\$250 Sapphire Level

- Preferred seating at all programs
- Invitation to sponsor receptions with guest speakers
- All Ruby Level benefits

\$500 Emerald Level

- Emerald Member listing in Women's Council event programs
- Invitation to sponsor receptions with guest speakers
- 2 complimentary VIP tickets to programs
- Prominent VIP seating at all programs
- All Ruby Level benefits

\$1,000 Diamond Level

- Diamond Member listing in Women's Council event programs
- Invitation to you and your guests to sponsor receptions with guest speakers
- 4 complimentary VIP tickets to programs, with complimentary valet parking
- Prominent VIP seating at all programs
- All Ruby Level benefits

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If you notice any one of these symptoms, you should seek a psychiatric evaluation. If you need help right away, you should seek immediate treatment from a hospital emergency room. Also, many psychiatrists will make themselves available to handle emergency cases.

Where Do I Start?

You can begin with your own physician. Tell your doctor what you are feeling. If, after a thorough physical examination to check whether any other medical illnesses may be contributing to your symptoms, the doctor recommends psychiatric treatment, ask for the names of two or three psychiatrists. You should also request a copy of your medical records for the psychiatrist to examine.

Your local medical or psychiatric society, community mental health center, and medical school are also good sources for referrals to psychiatrists. Of course, you might also seek the advice of family, friends, or colleagues.

Will My Insurance Pay for Treatment?

Check your health insurance for its coverage of treatment for mental and emotional disorders. All health insurance policies should include nondiscriminatory coverage for mental illness treatment. Unfortunately, many do not. Some important questions to ask in evaluating your health plan include:

- Does it provide the same coverage for mental illnesses that it does for other medical illnesses?
- Does it pay for all medically necessary services and treatments?
- Does it permit you to appeal an insurance company's decision that your treatment is not medically necessary?
- Can you see a psychiatrist of your choice without first seeing a general care "gatekeeper"?

Your health insurance plan should allow you to choose your own psychiatrist, even one who is "outside the plan" (although you

Did You Know?

How Mental Illness Affects Us

	Men	Women
Autism	S S S S	r
Suicide	S S S S	r
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	S S S	r
Bipolar Disorder	S	r
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	S	r
Schizophrenia	S	r
Social Phobia	S	r
Anxiety Disorders	S	rr
Major Depression	S	rr
Eating Disorders	S	rrr

probably will have to pay a larger portion of the cost yourself). Another option to consider, if your psychiatrist is not a participating physician in your health plan, is to ask whether he or she would be willing (or is allowed) to join your health plan's panel of physicians. Finally, many employers offer several health care options, and you may be able to switch to coverage that allows for greater flexibility in psychiatric treatment.

What Treatments Do Psychiatrists Use?

Today psychiatrists can select from many effective treatments and will work with you to create an effective program. Psychotherapy is a systematic method of treatment in which you and the psychiatrist meet at regularly scheduled intervals to discuss troubling problems and feelings. Various forms of psychotherapy can help patients change behaviors or thought patterns, explore the effect of past relationships and experiences on present behaviors, or treat troubled relationships.

Because psychiatrists are medical doctors, they can also determine whether there is a need for medication to help restore imbalances in body chemistry that are often a large part of mental illnesses. Beware of any psychiatrist or other therapist who espouses one brand of treatment as the only one that works. As with any other physician, ask about the benefits and risks of the treatment program outlined by the psychiatrist.

The Initial Visit

When you visit the psychiatrist, the doctor will ask questions about your background, family, habits, and general health and will ask why you think you need treatment. The psychiatrist will want to know when you last had a complete physical examination, may

ask to see your medical records, and may ask your permission to consult with your personal physician. The psychiatrist knows how to interpret laboratory results and other findings of the physical examination. You should feel free to ask questions about fees, appointment flexibility, cancellation policy, and insurance form processing.

When you've found a psychiatrist with whom you are comfortable, you've finished the first part of the treatment process. The second part—working together with your psychiatrist to understand and manage your illness—is about to begin.

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50th Anniversary Endowment Campaign



The Friends of Vista Hill 50th Anniversary Endowment campaign has been initiated to secure programs serving families struggling with developmental disabilities, substance abuse, and mental illness. The Lipinsky Family Foundation and the Parker Foundation provided matching funds to encourage the community to get involved in the campaign. Vista Hill is deeply grateful for this support and requests you call Ann Mound for further information (858) 514-5151.



Recommended Reading

Menopause: A Mental Health Practitioner's Guide

by Donna E. Stewart

Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children

by Sylvia Ann Hewlett

Making an Exit: A Mother-Daughter Drama with Alzheimer's, Machine Tools and Laughter

by Elinor Fuchs

Perfect Madness

by Judith Warner

Symptoms of Withdrawal

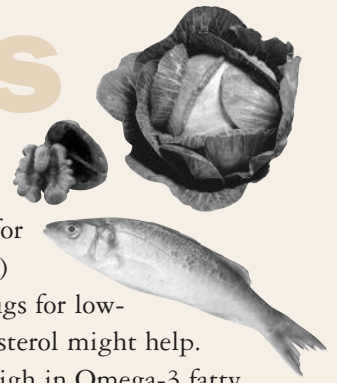
by Christopher

Kennedy Lawford

(available September 2005)

Trying to Prevent Alzheimer's

by Marsha Kay Seff Printed with permission from *The SD Union-Tribune*



Researchers have not yet discovered any surefire way to prevent Alzheimer's disease.

But, they believe, a lifestyle that promotes general good health couldn't hurt and just might help reduce the risk of the disease or at least delay the onset.

Because high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke are suspected risk factors for Alzheimer's and other dementias, decreasing those risks is a good start.

A heart-healthy diet makes sense, according to Mary Sundsmo, program director for UCSD Alzheimer's Disease Research Center in La Jolla.

In addition to good nutrition and supplements, health-care experts add physical and mental exercise.

According to Alzheimer's and other health-care specialists, the following list is a good place to start:

- Keep your weight down.
- Limit alcohol, though drinking a little wine may be helpful.
- Keep blood pressure down.
- Don't smoke or use street drugs.
- Stay involved with people and activities.
- Exercise your body regularly.
- Exercise your brain: that includes reading, continuing to learn and working crosswords.
- Protect your head against injuries, including wearing a helmet when riding a bike.
- Control blood sugar.
- Eat food rich in antioxidants, including dark vegetables and fruit, such as berries and grapes.
- Eat a low-fat, low cholesterol diet. (One study found that women with a high HDL "good" cholesterol level

were at lower risk for the disease.)

- Statins, drugs for lowering cholesterol might help.
- Eat foods high in Omega-3 fatty acids, found in nuts, such as walnuts, and cold-water fish, such as salmon, sardines, herring and tuna.
- Augment your diet with fish-oil capsules and yellow flax seed, canola, walnut and soybean oils.
- Some alternative medicine practitioners suggest taking vitamin E (but be advised that some recent studies indicate, on the contrary, that a high dose might increase the risk of death), and other supplements, including turmeric, ginkgo biloba, folic acid and CoQ10, an anti-inflammatory.



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