

Mental illness and physical health: the facts

People affected by mental illness experience much poorer physical health than the general population.

This is especially true of people living with a psychotic illness such as schizophrenia. It is important, therefore, that they are helped to monitor, maintain, and improve their physical wellbeing. Family, friends, health professionals, and support workers can all play a role in encouraging practical steps to achieve this.

People living with a long-term physical health condition also experience much higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders than the general population.

People with a psychotic illness have poor physical health for a variety of reasons. These are associated with symptoms, the side-effects of some medications, and a range of lifestyle factors such as diet and lack of exercise.

Conditions which people with psychotic illness experience at higher rates than the general population include:

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|---|-----------------------------------|-------|
| ⌚ | Chronic pain | 31.8% |
| ⌚ | Asthma | 30.1% |
| ⌚ | Heart or cardiovascular condition | 26.8% |
| ⌚ | Diabetes | 20.5% |

The range of risk factors includes:

Physical inactivity

Very few people with psychotic illness are physically active. Over nine out of ten (96.4%) are sedentary or physically inactive compared to 72% of the general population.

Obesity - Almost half of people with psychotic illness are obese (45.1%), double the rate of the general population.

Smoking - Two in three people (66.1%) with psychotic illness smoke tobacco. This is dramatically higher than the general population rate of 25.3%.

Substance abuse - The abuse of alcohol and drugs among people with psychotic illness is far higher than in the general population.

Metabolic syndrome - Half of people with psychotic illness (49.9%) have metabolic syndrome: a collection of risk factors that often occur together and can increase risk of cardiovascular disease (stroke or heart disease) and type 2 diabetes.

Note: A person is defined as 'at risk' of metabolic syndrome when they have abdominal obesity (excess fat in and around the stomach) plus 'at risk' status in at least two other cardiometabolic measures, including high density lipoproteins, blood pressure, triglycerides, plasma glucose. (International Diabetes Federation, 2006).

How do I find out more?

SANE Australia's Mind + Body initiative has produced a range of resources to promote improved physical health for people living with mental illness, including:

- ⌚ [Factsheets and podcasts](#)
- ⌚ [Healthy Living DVD Kit](#) - The Kit includes the *SANE Guide to Healthy Living* and a 23 minute DVD. In the DVD, people who've experienced illness talk about the things which have helped them live a healthier life.
- ⌚ [SANE Guide to Healthy Living](#) - Explains the benefits of being physically healthy, gives tips on how to start becoming healthier and overcome obstacles as well as giving suggestions on finding support to help stay healthy.
- ⌚ [SANE Healthy Living Guidelines for NGOs](#) - These Guidelines provide mental health NGOs with practical advice on how to integrate promotion of good physical health care into day-to-day practice.
- ⌚ [SANE Guide to a Smokefree Life](#) - Provides practical step-by-step tips for consumers and carers on how to quit smoking.

See the Mind + Body page on the SANE website for full details of these and other resources.

To order visit the SANE Bookshop at www.sane.org or call 1800 18 SANE (7263).