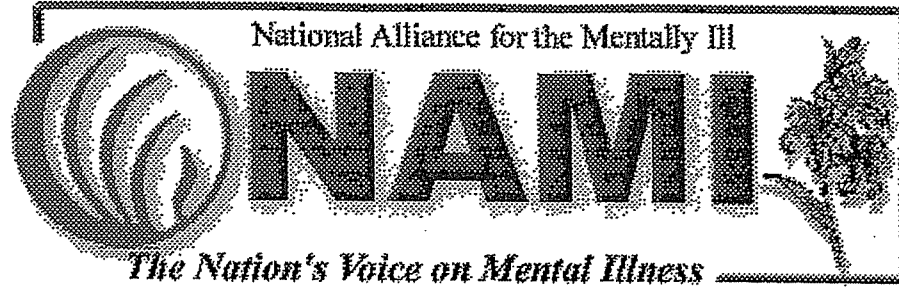


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What is Mental Illness?

Mental illnesses are disorders of the brain that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, moods, and ability to relate to others. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illnesses are brain disorders that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life.

Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income. Five million people in this country alone suffer from a serious chronic brain disorder. These illnesses greatly affect family members and society in general. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character, or poor upbringing.

Most importantly, these brain disorders are treatable. As a diabetic takes insulin, most people with serious mental illness need medication to help control symptoms. Supportive counseling, self-help groups, housing, vocational rehabilitation, income assistance and other community services can also provide support and stability, leaving the focus on recovery.

Nick Traina was one of the more than three million Americans affected by a severe mental illness called manic depression or bipolar disorder. Manic depression is highly treatable, and new options are continually improving the outlook for those who have the disorder. People with bipolar disorder experience mood swings that alternate from periods of severe highs (mania) to lows (depression). These abnormally intense moods may last for days, weeks, or months and are often separated by periods of fairly normal moods. After accurate diagnosis, most people with bipolar disorder can be successfully treated with medication in 80 percent to 90 percent of all cases.

[NAMI talks with bestselling author Danielle Steel about her son's mental illness](#)

[Danielle Steel shares her son's valiant struggle with manic depression](#)

[What is Mental Illness?](#)

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