

## Self-Injury

Self-injury is a non-suicidal but deliberate act of harming oneself such as cutting or scratching. Self-injury is a harmful way of coping with frustration, emotional pain, or anger. While an individual is self-harming, it can cause a temporary sense of calmness or tension release, but it is commonly followed by feelings of guilt, shame, and painful emotions.

## Signs & Symptoms

Life-threatening injuries are typically not intended while an individual is inflicting an injury on themselves but if an individual is self-harming, it can show signs of greater underlying problems that need attention. If someone notices the injuries, the individual may make excuses as to how they happened. Self-injury typically occurs in private and is done in a specific, controlled manner that commonly leaves a pattern marks on the skin. Any area of the body may be used for self-injury, but the arms, legs and front of the torso are the most common areas. Signs of self-injury may include:

- Scars on the skin, often in patterns
- Fresh cuts, bruises, burns, scratches, bite marks, or other injuries
- Wearing long sleeves or pants, even in hot weather
- Statements of hopelessness, helplessness, or worthlessness
- Excessive rubbing of an area to create a burn

## Causes & Risk Factors

Most people who self-injure are teenagers and young adults, although those in other age groups also self-injure. Self-injury often starts in the preteen or early teen years, when teens face increasing peer pressure, loneliness, and conflicts with parents or other authority figures. Certain factors may increase the risk of self-injury, including:

- **Having friends who self-injure.** People who have friends who intentionally harm themselves are more likely to begin self-injuring.
- **Traumatic events.** Some people who injure themselves were neglected, were sexually, physically or emotionally abused, or experienced other traumatic events.
- **Mental health issues.** Self-injury is commonly associated with certain mental disorders, such as borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety disorders, or eating disorders.
- **Alcohol or drug use.** People are often under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs

## Diagnosis & Treatment

A mental health professional can diagnose an individual who self-injures by completing a clinical assessment. The doctor might also screen for other underlying mental health issues such as major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, a personality disorder, anxiety disorders (especially OCD), and psychotic disorders like schizophrenia. Treatment plans commonly consist therapy such a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy or may include a combination of medications such as antianxiety or antidepressants.

Sources – Centers for Disease Control [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/facts.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/facts.html) and Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/self-injury/symptoms-causes/syc-20350950>