

Self-Injury (Self-Mutilation, Cutting)

What is self injury?

Self-injury is most often called cutting. It is the act of injuring your body on purpose. It is not done as a suicide attempt but is often an impulsive activity used as a way to regain control over life.

The most common form is cutting with a sharp object. It can also involve burning, scratching, hitting body parts or objects, or hair pulling. Some people might eat or drink toxic substances.



Who does it and why?

Self-injury is most common among teens and young adults. It is often done to cope with stress or to change a person's mood. People may harm themselves to relieve stress, anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem. They think physical pain will help them forget about their emotions.

Most people who injure themselves are not "crazy." Instead, they are trying to find a way to cope. It can be an addiction much like alcohol, drug abuse, or an eating disorder. For some people, self-injury may be a symptom of a mental health issue or abuse.



Why is it dangerous?

The injury can be quite serious. Cuts may require stitches. They can get infected if a dirty or non-sterile object is used. Cutting can cause scars that last forever. It can cause a large loss of blood, or even death. Cutting can become habit forming.

Is there any way to stop?

Yes. Self-injury is often linked to strong feelings of shame or being embarrassed. Deciding to get help is the first step. Talking to a healthcare provider, teacher, school counselor, or another trusted adult may help. There are therapies to help people find better ways to cope with their emotions. There are medicines that can help even out moods.

ALERT: Call your healthcare provider, nurse, or clinic staff if you have any questions or concerns or if you:

- Feel like you want to harm yourself.
- Have special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for yourself. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.