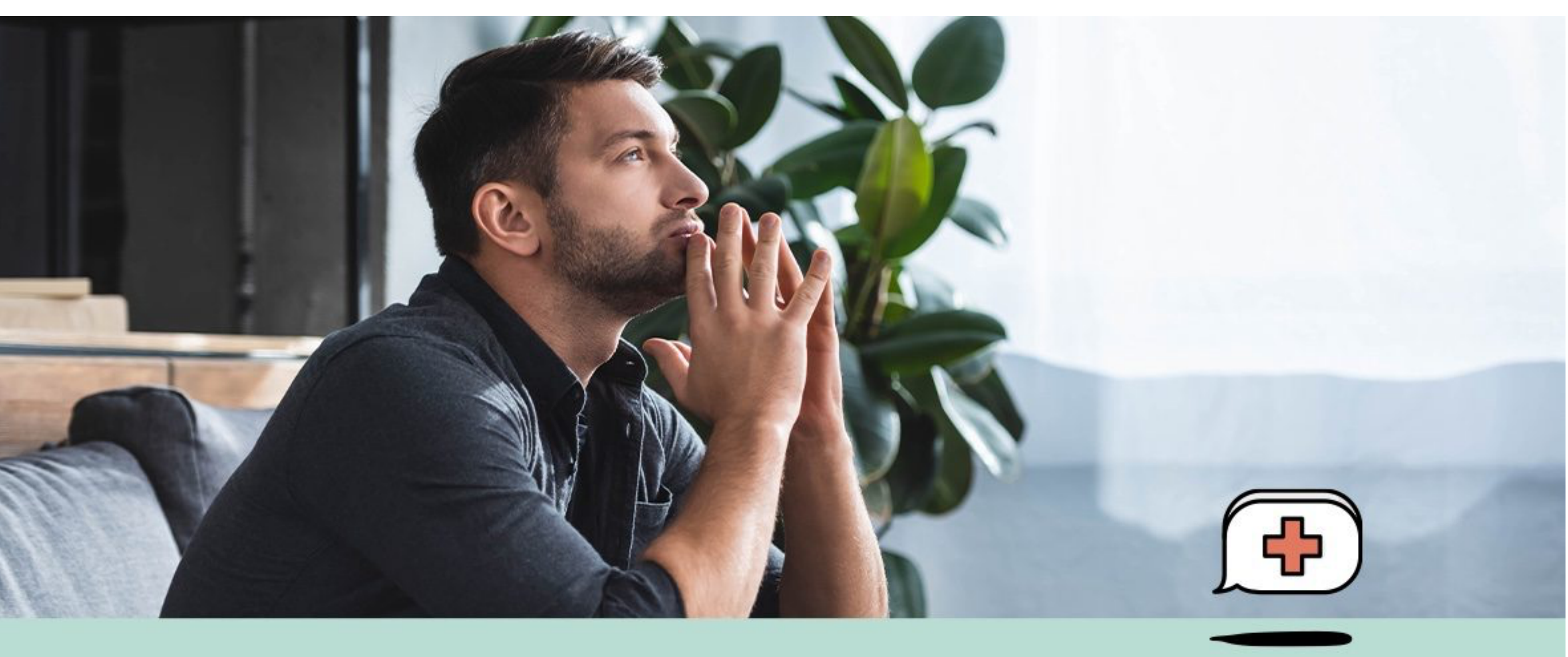


See all > [Mental health](#)



[Mental health](#)
April 20, 2022 · 4 min read

Share this article [f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

The difference between psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy

Navigating mental health challenges can be difficult — especially with so many professionals who all seem to have complex titles that start with “psych.” That’s why we’re breaking down everything you need to know about three of the most commonly confused terms.

What’s a psychologist? What’s a psychiatrist? What’s a psychotherapist? And when should you see a psychologist vs a psychiatrist vs a psychotherapist? Read on for all you need to know about the differences between psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists.

How psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists approach mental health

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists specialize in human behaviour and mental conditions. But they don’t treat [mental health](#) in the same way.

 <p>Psychiatrists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a medical degree • Provide assessments, diagnosis, prescriptions and some talk therapy • Treat conditions rooted in biology or neurochemistry 	 <p>Psychologists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a degree in psychology • Provide a wide array of talk therapies • Trained to provide psychological testing, diagnosis, and counselling/psychotherapy 	 <p>Psychotherapists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsellors, social workers, or psychiatrists with additional masters level training in psychotherapy • Can specialize in group or couples talk therapy • Treat conditions rooted in emotions or behaviour
---	--	--

Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists focus on disciplines like biology and neurochemistry to help determine the cause of mental illnesses. They often [prescribe medications](#) to physically treat a condition alongside methods like talk therapy.

Psychologist

Psychologists use psychological science to focus on your personal behaviours and diagnose mental illnesses. They’ll often monitor sleep, behaviours, or eating habits, and probe into the negative thoughts that could be causing your concern.

Psychotherapist

Psychotherapists are mental health professionals that specialize in talk therapy to help you understand yourself better by learning healthy coping techniques. Psychotherapists can include psychologists, psychoanalysts, social workers, and some psychiatrists.

Difference in education and training

While psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists have to go through rigorous, extensive training in their fields, their education is very different from one another.

Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists are medical doctors, meaning they’ve earned a degree in medicine. They have much of the same training as a doctor you’d see in a family practice, except they’ve chosen to focus their expertise on treating mental illness and undergone an additional four or more years of training specifically in psychiatry.

Psychologist

Psychologists have a PhD in psychology, but aren’t trained in medicine. That’s why a psychologist can’t prescribe medication. However, because of their focus on the behavioural and emotional causes of mental illness, they can provide assessments and diagnosis as well as a variety of therapy options.

Psychotherapist

[Psychotherapists](#) can be counsellors, social workers, or psychiatrists, with specialized certifications in their field. Psychotherapists primarily use counseling, known as talk therapy, to facilitate personal change.

How psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists treat mental health concerns

Just like their training, there are different treatment methods used by psychiatrists vs psychologists vs psychotherapists. It’s important to note that a [mental health physician](#) can also provide assistance with medication and prescriptions when a diagnosis is available.

Psychiatrist

Because they can write prescriptions, psychiatrists usually use a combination of medications and talk therapy to help address their patient’s issues.

When prescribing new medications, psychiatrists will request frequent updates from their patients to ensure the medications and dosages are helping. It can take some time to find the right dosage and/or balance of medications to help a patient while having the least possible side effects.

Psychologist

Though they don’t have the ability to write prescriptions for their patients, psychologists often use different, more diverse types of therapy to diagnose and treat mental illness.

Certain unique types of therapy, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, may be used to help uncover the underlying emotional causes of mental illness. Psychologists will also specialize in various types of testing, such as IQ or [brain health assessments](#).

Psychotherapist

A psychotherapist, also called a mental health therapist, will focus on different types of talk therapy, such as interpersonal, cognitive-behavioural, dialectical, supportive, and others.

If your psychotherapist is also a psychiatrist, they’ll have the ability to prescribe medication.

To get to the root of the problem, psychotherapy can be offered in different formats, including couples, families, and groups, along with individual therapy sessions.

Common conditions treated by psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists

While there are key differences in the training and available treatments psychiatrists, psychotherapists and psychologists provide, there is often overlap in the conditions they treat as there is no “one size fits all” solution to your mental health.

Psychiatrist

For someone with a very serious mental health problem, which might make it hard for them to take care of themselves, or someone who needs medication to adjust certain chemical levels in their brains, psychiatrists are a good choice.

Some examples of mental illnesses they treat are:

- Major depressive disorder – a mood disorder that results in feelings like [sadness, lethargy, and loss](#).
- Bipolar disorder – a mental health condition that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, concentration, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks.
- Schizophrenia – a mental disorder in which people interpret reality abnormally that can result in hallucinations, delusions, and disordered thinking.
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder ([OCD](#)) – a disorder in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or behaviors (compulsions) that they feel the urge to repeat over and over.

Psychologist

By the same token, if you have long-term emotional issues, are having difficulty processing traumatic events, or have recently noticed changes in your emotional well-being, psychologists could be a good fit for you. Psychologists use a variety of approaches directed toward the maintenance and enhancement of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and interpersonal functioning.

They help treat neuropsychological disorders and dysfunctions such as:

- Anxiety and panic disorders – a variety of disorders that can result in excessive fear, [anxiety](#), and panic attacks.
- Phobias – irrational or excessive fears that are present for more than six months.
- Insomnia – a sleep disorder that can make it hard to fall asleep, stay asleep, or cause you to wake up too early and not get back to sleep.
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder ([PTSD](#)) – a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a traumatic event.

Psychotherapist

Psychotherapy can be beneficial if you are troubled by mood disorders, but it can also be applied to anyone interested in learning new coping skills or looking to better understand their thoughts and life experiences.

They can help treat conditions such as:

- Addiction and substance abuse – a chronic condition marked by substance use or behaviors that continue despite negative outcomes.
- Eating disorders (e.g. anorexia, bulimia) – disorders characterised by disturbances in behaviours, thoughts, and attitudes to food, eating, and body weight or shape.
- Personality disorders – a type of mental disorder in which you have a rigid and unhealthy pattern of thinking, functioning, and behaving.
- Work stress – the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities.

Bottom line

To summarize, psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists are different means to the same end. They each identify and treat mental illnesses for their patients. However, they generally offer different types of therapy treatments and solutions based on their training and expertise.

They all examine factors that could be causing mental illness, but psychiatrists can offer prescriptions to their patients, while psychologists can’t. Psychologists are trained in a different variety of specialty therapies for treating patients than psychiatrists that don’t have a psychotherapy practice.

Maple has you covered for a number of [online therapy services](#). Book now for a [visit with a psychotherapist](#). Visits with a [mental health physician](#) are also available. No matter what your needs are, our Canadian-licensed mental health practitioners are there for you.

Need help with mental health?

[Register](#)

<p>Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How it works Meet our doctors Treatable conditions Pricing Online prescriptions 	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blog FAQ Testimonials Help desk Contact us 	<p>Company</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About us Security Newsroom Careers Become a provider 	<p>Specialties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dermatology Online therapy Endocrinology Naturopathy All specialties 	<p>Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business solutions Employers Insurers Brokers Strategic partners 	<p>Care delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care delivery solutions Hospitals Clinics Long-term care Care systems
<p>Conditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acne treatment Depression treatment UTI treatment ED treatment Anxiety treatment All conditions 	<p>Medications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Viagra Cialis Finasteride Amoxicillin Valacyclovir All medications 	<p>Locations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toronto Vancouver Calgary Winnipeg Ottawa All locations 	<p>Regions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ontario Quebec British Columbia Alberta Manitoba All regions 	<p>Compare Maple to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telehealth Ontario Felix TELUS Health MyCare Access Virtual Tia Health WebMD 	

Sign up for our newsletter

Your email address*

