Self Injury
Cutting, Self Harm, or Self Mutilation

Self injury occurs when a person injures him or herself on purpose, but not as an attempt at suicide. It may also be called self harm, self mutilation, self abuse or non-suicidal self injury. Harming your own body can be an unhealthy way to cope with emotional pain, anger, or frustration.

Forms of self injury
The most common forms of self injury are:
• Skin cutting
• Head banging or hitting
• Burning skin

Other forms of self injury include:
• Scratching to the point of drawing blood
• Punching self or objects
• Infecting oneself on purpose
• Inserting objects into body openings
• Drinking something harmful, like bleach or detergent
• Breaking bones on purpose

Most people who self harm will do it in more than one way.

Why people self harm
Self injury can be a way for some people to cope with or relieve painful feelings they find hard to express. It is often not a suicide attempt. This may bring the person a brief feeling of relief, often followed by guilt and shame.

Self injury can also be a way to have control over your body when you can’t control anything else in your life. A lot of people who cut themselves also have an eating disorder, for example.

Common reasons people report self injuring:
• Feeling empty inside
• Unable to express their feelings
• Feeling lonely or not understood by others
• Being afraid of intimate relationships or adult responsibilities
Warning signs

- Often has injuries that cannot be explained
- Low self-esteem
- Hard time handling feelings
- Problems with relationships or avoids relationships
- Doing poorly at work or school
- Problems at home

People who self injure may try to hide the injuries, such as covering scars with clothing. You may notice them wearing clothes that don’t fit the situation, like long sleeves and pants in hot weather. If discovered, a person who self-injures may make excuses as to how an injury happened, such as “I fell” or “The cat scratched me.” Without treatment, the person can develop a pattern of doing it over and over.

Treatment

Self injury behaviors can be a sign of other mental illnesses, so the person showing signs should be checked by a mental health professional.

Treatment of self injury is most often medicine and different types of therapy.

- **Medicine** may be used to help manage issues that contribute to self injury, such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and racing thoughts.
- **Cognitive or behavioral therapy** helps people to understand and manage their destructive thoughts and behaviors through talking with a mental health professional.
- **Interpersonal therapy** helps people to gain insight and skills for developing and maintaining relationships in their lives.

If you think someone is self injuring

If you think someone you know is self injuring, encourage him or her to seek treatment as early as possible. If it is your child, get him or her help right away. You can call an area mental health center, ask your family doctor for a referral, or check with your insurance company for a list of network providers.

Sources: Mental Health America, [http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/self-injury](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/self-injury)