

Disability Campaign.org

Top 10 Causes of Disability

Disability can happen to anyone, of any age. Though some may be the result of accidents or injuries that are unavoidable, many disabilities are the result of diseases and health conditions that can be prevented. With simple lifestyle changes, such as exercising, eating healthy, minimizing stress, and getting more sleep, you can help reduce your likelihood of becoming disabled.

Listed below are the top leading causes of disability in the U.S. according to the World Health Organization (WHO), ranked from highest to lowest based on a measured unit called “disability-adjusted life years” (DALYs) that represents the total number of years lost to illness, disability, or premature death.



1. Neuropsychiatric Disorders (18.7 DALYs)

- **Mental and Behavioral Disorders (13.6 DALYs)**

- Addictions to drugs, alcohol, and medications
- Eating Disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia
- Mood Disorders, including bipolar disorder and depression
- Sleep Disorders, such as insomnia
- It's important that treatment be sought and maintained, as many mental and behavioral disorders may lead to worsening symptoms and risky behaviors when left untreated.

- **Neurological Disorders (5.1 DALYs)**

- Neurological disorders are diseases of the brain, spine, and the nerves that connect them.
- These include ALS, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, and stroke.
- Because some neurological disorders may be progressive, meaning they can worsen with time, close monitoring and medical care is essential to a person's overall wellbeing.

2. Cardiovascular and Circulatory Diseases (16.8 DALYs)



- These include heart disease, heart attacks, ischemic stroke (the most common type), heart failure, and arrhythmias.
- Heart diseases are very preventable. You can start by knowing your blood pressure and keeping it under control, exercising regularly, quitting smoking, and eating lots of fruits and vegetables to maintain a healthy weight.

3. Neoplasms (15.1 DALYs)

- Neoplasms are essentially tumors (abnormal growth of tissue) that form in some part of the body.
- Some are benign (non-cancerous) and others are malignant (cancerous).
- Some cancers can be screened through routine exams such as mammograms or colonoscopies; others may be harder to detect and require bloodwork or other tests. That's why it's important to visit your doctor regularly and not miss any cancer prevention screenings recommended by your physician.

4. Musculoskeletal Disorders (11.8 DALYs)

- These range from back pain that becomes chronic, to genetic disorders that affect the spine or muscles, to amputations that may impair a person's ability to work or perform daily functions.
- Start stretching and exercising regularly, and make sure your workstation is ergonomic to prevent any work-related injuries.
- Don't ignore pain! Pain is your body's way of signaling that something is wrong. Visit a medical care professional that will help determine the cause of your discomfort, as well as provide you with ways in which you can prevent further injury.

5. Diabetes, Urogenital, Blood, and Endocrine Disease (8.0 DALYs)

- Of these, the most common in the U.S. is diabetes, particularly Type 2 diabetes.
- Diabetes means your blood glucose, or blood sugar, levels are too high. For those with unmanaged or severe diabetes, there is an increased risk of blindness, renal failure, and amputation.
- Begin eating healthier and managing your weight. If you notice an increase in fatigue, hair loss, or uncontrolled appetite, these may be signs of an endocrine disorder. If so, talk to your general physician; he or she may recommend you see a specialist.

6. Chronic Respiratory Diseases (6.5 DALYs)

- Common chronic respiratory diseases include asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer, and sleep apnea.
- If you're a smoker, it's time to quit, as smoking will only worsen any existing breathing problems and increase your risk of lung cancer.



7. Other Noncommunicable (Chronic) Diseases (5.1 DALYs)

- They are not passed from person to person, but tend to be of longer duration and progress slowly.
- These include heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, lung disease, as well as other long-term health conditions like fibromyalgia, dementia, or digestive disorders.
- Risk factors are a mix of genetics (your family history), lifestyle, and your environment, so limit alcohol, quit tobacco use, eat healthy, and exercise.

8. Unintentional Injuries (Non-transport) (3.6 DALYs)



- Drownings, burns, and falls are some of the most common injuries.
- Children and the elderly are more at risk.
- Minimize risks by maintaining a safe home, wearing well-fitting shoes, and observing your surroundings for any hazards.

9. Self-harm and Interpersonal Violence (3.1 DALYs)

- Self-directed violence or injury, such as cutting, severe drinking, or attempted suicide, can lead to disabling and even deadly consequences.
- Unfortunately, people with chronic illness or disabilities are even more at risk of engaging in self-harm activities.
- The signs of suicide can be many, but if you or someone you know needs help, do not hesitate to contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255.

10. Transport Injuries (3.0 DALYs)

- We all need to go from one place to another, but we can do so safely by wearing seatbelts, driving at or below the speed-limit, and not driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Make sure to always follow the guidelines set for child car seats and to educate your teen on car safety.
- To learn more, go to www.safercar.gov.



References

[US Burden of Disease Collaborators. The state of US health, 1990-2010: burden of diseases, injuries, and risk factors. *JAMA*, 310\(6\): 591-608, 2013.](#)

Joni and Friends can assume no liability in the recommendation of any product, service or organization, nor does this constitute an endorsement.

© Joni and Friends, 2017

Used by permission of **Joni and Friends**

P.O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91376

www.joniandfriends.org