

Self injury is a common problem in our society today. A large percentage of adolescents engage in this behavior and health care workers will most probably meet some of these as patients at some point in their career. There has been a lot of research on self inflicted injury over the last decade or so, but it is rarely a part of the curriculum for most health care workers.

This article aims to give a brief summery on today's' knowledge about self injury. It contains a description of the behavior, it discusses possible causes, treatments and consequences and suggests what can be done in order to prevent this behavior. The article is based on on a literature search from PubMed and articles from The Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association.

The article concentrates on self injury as an act of deliberately doing damage to one self, and this damage is the primary cause of the behavior. It does not include self injuries done in the name of religion or damage to tissue as an adverse effect, as would be the case in for example drug abuse, eating disorders and smoking. Body modifications that are intended for ornamentation are not considered a form of selfmutilation, as they are done for spiritual or social purposes. The modification of one's body by tattooing, piercing or plastic surgery for the purpose of decoration is considered culturally sanctioned and is not measured as a form of selfmutilation.