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Speech
What is Self-Injury?

There's probably one in the room right now. That girl sitting behind you, or the boy that's sitting across the room... *even me*. According to [Newsweek](#), it is estimated that two million Americans suffer daily. What is it that they suffer from? Hiccups? Nightmares? No, it is something far more damaging. It's called Self-Injury, or SI, and the majority of the sufferers are teenagers and young adults like you and I. Through research, as well as the experiences of friends, I've come to learn more about SI. You may ask, what is SI, what causes it, and how can you stop? We'll discuss this and more today.

First, what is SI? According to [teenadvice.org](#), it's about one person hurting him or herself. It includes burning, slicing, scraping, tearing and picking at skin, and is known basically as cutting. It's also an addiction. It begins with your nerves, which signal your brain especially when you hurt yourself. The brain is told immediately about the trouble and sends out endorphins, which reach the injury and relax and relieve the pain some. *It becomes a relief to hurt yourself.*

That may seem like a contradiction, but it's not. According to [Janice McLane in an article on pain and communication](#), the injury shows the difference between the pain and the pain-free of a person's world. The pain exists now, not any other time. It shows the boundary between existence and nonexistence. It legitimizes a person, defining them. **I hurt, therefore I am.** It's a way to control something. Even if you can't control everyone else, *you have control over your own body.* The injury becomes a form of communication.

A communication of what, you may ask. This leads us to our second question—what causes SI? Unfortunately, the causes vary. It can come from stress at school, problems at home, childhood abuse. It becomes, as [Sally Kubetin in OB-GYN News wrote](#), a relief of unbearable anxiety, anger or sadness. It's self-reinforcing. What starts off as digging your nails into your palms, grows. It becomes scratching. But it isn't enough. It becomes a safety pin, a razor, a knife. For a release to be achieved, the pain must become more.

Sadly, one cause has come to light. Youths have begun to self-injure because their friends do. Or they may hear that Johnny Depp, Angelina Jolie and others have all been outed as 'cutters'. Though it is true that these celebrities admitted to self-injuring, that is no reason for a person to begin cutting.

What can be done, then, to stop self-injuring, either in yourself or in a friend? [self-injury.net](#) outlines two avenues.

- Ø **Talk to other people.** Self-injury keeps others at a distance, physically and emotionally. You lie. Maybe you're trying to hide the scars. The first step to stopping is to let someone get close to you. Talk to them about the scars. Let someone touch them. Let someone come close, and they may be able to help you.
- Ø **Therapy can also help.** You have to ask why you're seeking therapy, what you hope to achieve and why you want therapy now. It doesn't mean an instant cure. But it's a step in the right direction.

Stopping isn't simple. Monitor where you are most likely to SI and when. Make anything you self-injure with as inaccessible as possible. Get support wherever you can. When you feel the need to cut, call a friend. If you can break the cycle of thoughts, you'll be less likely to hurt yourself. Change positive to negative. No matter how subtle, it helps to build a long-term healing process.

If all else fails, distract yourself from the urge to SI. Exercise. Hold an ice cube. Write something. Snap your wrist with a rubber band. Scream. Pray. Draw. Dance. Fight a pillow. Vent. Do something that releases the tension. By doing so, you alter the need to hurt yourself.

It's also important to remember that negative reactions are completely probable. Or you could run into non-reaction. However, trying to understand others' reactions will help with coping with them. And it becomes another step towards healing.

Perhaps **you** don't injure yourself. Perhaps you don't know anyone who does. But being forewarned is forearmed. You now know what it means to self-injure, and ways to stop. In the future, a friend may come to you and say "You may not have noticed this... but I cut myself when I'm stressed." It affects over 2 million Americans. How will you respond?