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for you and your family

PARTNERS
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PROGRAM

Men's Health: Emotional Well-Being is Key

We may be well aware of the condition of our body's systems—like cardiovascular, digestive and musculoskeletal—but it's easier to miss what can't be captured in an image: *our emotional health*. Particularly for men, the condition of their emotional and mental health is often overlooked. However, men's emotional wellness plays a vital role in their overall health, so it's important to be aware of it and take action if a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety is interfering with daily life.

Men are not as adept at recognizing symptoms. Rather than admitting they might be suffering with depression, men are often more willing to acknowledge physical symptoms. These include things like tiredness, irritability, headaches and sleep problems. They may not be as willing to admit having emotional feelings such as fear, sadness, hopelessness or guilt.

Depression can impact men and women differently. Studies indicate that while men and women may experience the same emotions, men's outward symptoms often differ. Some of the signs of male depression include a noted lack of patience, escaping life through work or sports, engaging in reckless behavior, decreased interest in personal relationships, expressions of rage, and alcohol or substance abuse.

Male depression is more closely linked to suicide. Undiagnosed depression is the leading cause of suicide. In general, men are four times more likely than women to die by suicide. Men's methods of a suicide attempt are usually more lethal and they may show fewer warning signs of suicidal intent.

Depression places older men at greater risk. Compared with older women, older men are less likely to recognize their symptoms of depression and obtain treatment. Men over the age of 60 have been shown to be at greater risk of suicide than women of the same age.

Depression is an illness for which treatment works. Contrary to some myths, depression does not represent emotional weakness or a failure of masculinity. It is a medical condition that responds well to treatment, whether in the form of counseling, medication or both.

This newsletter focuses on how friends and family members can better understand and assist men who may be suffering with depression.

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This month we focus on the topic of mental health and emotional well-being as an important component of men's overall health. Just as men need to actively take care of their physical health, they also need to nurture and maintain their mental health.

Sometimes men don't seek the help they need when they're suffering with a mental health problem—such as depression or anxiety—that is getting in the way of their normal daily routine. So it's important to share feelings, seek support and get treatment.

Remember that through your ParTNers EAP, you and your family members can access confidential in-person and telephonic counseling toll-free at **1.855.Here4TN** (1.855.437.3486). You can also visit the www.HERE4TN.com website for a wealth of information about mental health conditions. Plus, you can access a **confidential depression self-screening** on your ParTNers website under Health Information/Self Assessments.



Visit www.Here4TN.com now!

The Perils of the Strong, Silent Type

The image of the tough, independent, fearless, man-of-steel male still echoes through our culture as depicted in books and movies. Men are traditionally supposed to be stoic—and immune to worry, doubt and fear. But it's clear by now that this stereotype is not helpful for today's man who must deal with a complex array of family and work stressors in a time of economic uncertainty.



- **Traditional roles were limiting.** In past eras, it was not expected that men would be able to communicate intimately and sensitively with others. More value was placed upon strength and discipline. Whether consciously or unconsciously, some men still feel the need to fulfill the role of the ever-steady male.
- **Discussing emotions is difficult for some.** Traditional roles have not encouraged men to talk about their feelings—to express pain or sadness or fear. An example is the military, where stigma about acknowledging mental health problems has often prevailed. As a result, many men remain uncomfortable talking about depression. This can isolate them in the middle of their struggles.
- **Men may avoid seeking care.** Characteristics such as toughness and independence often discourage men from seeking medical or behavioral care when they need it. It is common for men to believe they can overcome their depression on their own or “tough it out.”
- **Men may hide their problems.** Men are more likely than women to be in denial about their feelings and to mask them behind other behaviors. These can include things like drug or alcohol use, compulsive gambling or other risky or reckless activities that serve to dull the pain of depression.
- **Family and friends can help spot depression.** Everyone gets “the blues” from time to time. However, if a man’s feelings of sadness are intense or continue for two weeks or more, depression might be the cause. It’s important to encourage him to speak with a counselor or doctor.
- **Foster a positive, supportive environment.** Let him know that you care and that it is okay to share problems and worries. Talking about issues face to face can help quite a bit. (See the article at right.) Don’t encourage someone to “snap out of it” or “just get over it.” Depression is a medical disorder that responds to treatment, so seek help through a primary care physician, mental health professional or your ParTNers EAP.

Talking About Depression

When someone suspects that a male family member may be depressed, it can be a difficult subject to address. Here are tips on discussing depression.

- Without seeming critical, point out specific changes in his behavior. You might say you’ve noticed that he doesn’t seem to enjoy his usual activities. He may not have noticed the changes.
- Listen carefully to his concerns, and offer your patience, understanding and encouragement. This can help him feel less isolated.
- If you think it’s a sensitive area, watch your wording. Some men may not want to discuss “depression,” but they don’t feel as threatened talking about stress or fatigue.
- Although connecting with others can help, try to keep him from getting overly committed to activities that could increase his stress.
- Get help immediately if he mentions wanting to die or otherwise harm himself or others. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Men are likely to feel angry, irritable and frustrated rather than “sad when depressed.”



PTSD and Men

June is Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) awareness month. PTSD is a type of anxiety that can develop after a person is exposed to a frightening event in which physical harm occurred or was threatened. In men, any reluctance to seek treatment for this debilitating condition can put them at great risk.

- While PTSD is commonly associated with the aftermath of military combat, many other types of events can trigger PTSD. These include violent personal assaults, disasters, accidents or a loved one's sudden death. Witnesses of traumatic events can also be affected.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that PTSD afflicts from 10 to 20 percent of veterans of recent wars.
- PTSD symptoms can include persistent frightening memories of incidents, nightmares, emotional numbness, irritability, outbursts of anger, and intense feelings of guilt.
- If a man is experiencing the anxiety-driven symptoms of PTSD, it is very important that he is evaluated and treated by a mental health professional who is experienced with PTSD.
- Some military leaders advocate removing the word "disorder" from the diagnosis, as this may reduce stigma and encourage more people to get help.
- We are focusing on PTSD and men but please note that PTSD affects women and children as well.

Improve Relationships with Communication

Everyone can work on improving their communication skills, including men who haven't devoted much attention to this area. Better communication with partners, children and coworkers can strengthen relationships. Some tips include:

Listen actively. Active listening is the foundation for all effective communication. Striving to understand the other person's points can help you connect better. Repeat and clarify what has been said and do not give in to distractions.

Be encouraging. Offer encouragement and enthusiastic praise to others. Show that you value and appreciate them.

Engage children and teens better. Ask open-ended questions that require more than a one-word "yes" or "no" answer. Ask them for their opinions about their recent experiences, current events or favorite entertainment.

Keep things light. Use tasteful humor as an icebreaker. This helps cut stress and put people more at ease with you. Also, wear a smile whenever possible. Smiling almost always fosters positive interactions and better understanding between people.

