

“ Only if the men in our society are healthy, happy, fulfilled and positive, can relationships, families, workplaces and societies share the same positivity. ”

MEN'S HEALTH

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I was recently at a dinner titled “Men’s Mental Health” at Kooyong Tennis Club held by two colleagues that had just lost a friend to suicide and depression. There were roughly 260 men, mainly from the Corporate and Business sector that had gathered to hear Dr Patrick McGorry, Psychiatrist and Australian of the Year, present a forum on depression and suicide.

Unlike women, men often suffer silently with their problems, and frequently conceal their issues without discussing them with family or friends, until they reach a crisis point. The statistics show that roughly 1 in 6 men in Australia will suffer from depression at any point in time. It maybe mild and self-limiting or it maybe more severe leading men to ultimately seek assistance. Men are four times more likely to commit suicide than women. As opposed to women who tend to share their problems with friends, family or their GP, men more often turn to alcohol, drugs or even work as a means to cope with their problem.

The Asian and Indian cultures often have a greater safety net, with extended families helping and assisting men with mental health problems. However, once couples and families have moved to Australia, these

extended networks tend to breakdown, leading to the immediate family being the only support network. Cultural expectations of men, and what it is to be a “successful male” may also be different to the general Australian population.

Though I work as a Urologist I frequently meet IndoAsian men who have recently migrated to Australia, presenting with problems such as frequent urination or pelvic pain. After negative investigations and with some probing beneath the surface it often becomes apparent that the issue lies deeper, and that depression and anxiety form the basis for their presentation. The pressures of settling in a new country; finding employment and an income; providing for a young family; isolation from family and friends- these are all a perfect recipe for depression. Just recently there was a murder/suicide in an Indian family with 2 young children. As a community and society we all have take some responsibility for such devastating tragedies.

As individuals, every man is “hardwired” differently. By nature some are more programmed to develop issues such as depression and anxiety, particularly when placed in the “pressure cooker” situation

of life. When things are progressing smoothly and with adequate family support, everything may seem fine, but the minute they are faced with stress, the whole system may come tumbling down. Some of the risk factors for male depression include: Genetic predisposition; Life stressors such as loss of job; separation from or death of partner; financial problems; chronic health problem or chronic pain; or any major life transition such as retirement.

Whilst it is normal for moods to fluctuate, there are some things that can be done to keep the blues away. Involvement with a group, whether it be through sports, local community, religion or community association, or spiritual group leads to a sense of community and belonging to something bigger than the smaller isolated self.

Daily exercise is underestimated as a means for promoting strong emotional health. The feeling of physical freedom in one’s body, as well as the release of natural endorphins, helps promote a sense of well-being. Moderation in alcohol is important. Whilst alcohol in moderation amongst friends and family can enhance wellbeing, in excess, alcohol is one of the most powerful depression inducing substances. A healthy diet which includes a broad range of foods is also beneficial. Omega 3 Fatty acids found in fish oil, walnuts, flaxseeds and chia seeds maybe beneficial, along with oats are worth including. Meditation, prayer, yoga, fresh air, sunshine, regular breaks, adequate sleep, are all building blocks that keep depression away.

If despite everything, depression is getting the better of you, it is best to seek advice early. See your General practitioner; speak to a trusted family member or friend. Occasionally antidepressants maybe required for a short period and in some instances it may need to be ongoing. Slowly there is increasing awareness of Depression through the work of organizations such as Beyond Blue; Men’s Sheds; and Life Again. Although it is good to see more awareness about depression, I would however like to see a greater emphasis on promoting WELLNESS as a concept in society.

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