

Doctors' Voice

September-October 2015

Mental Health Problems – early care helps

Early help for a mental health issue can make a big difference. If you are finding feelings of anxiety, distress, sadness or other feelings difficult to overcome, or if emotional or behavioural problems significantly disrupt your life, you can get help from your doctor. Public specialist mental health services are available to assess and treat people with serious mental illness, including those experiencing a psychiatric crisis. If emotional or behavioural problems are significantly disrupting your life, it's important that you seek professional assistance early.

The term 'mental health problem' describes a broad range of emotional and behavioural difficulties, which will affect most people at some stage in their lives, including:

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Loss of energy or motivation.



People experiencing these feelings may get through the crisis without needing professional help. However, it is sometimes difficult for people to overcome emotional or behavioural difficulties, and this may affect their ability to care for themselves or their dependents, to socialise, to work or to study. In these instances, it may be important to seek advice from a professional.

Almost all mental health problems can be treated or at least lessened in their severity and – as with many physical health problems – it is better to receive treatment early.

Where to get help

- Speak with your doctor
- Lifeline 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au
- Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelpline.com.au
- Mensline Australia 1300 789 978
- SuicideLine 1300 651 251



RUOK? Day is 10 September 2015

If your gut says something's not quite right with someone, chances are that they might need a bit of extra support from the people around them. They might be acting a bit differently, seem to have a lot on their plate, or simply aren't themselves. Don't ignore those signs but instead take some time to start a conversation.

One of the great things about asking "are you ok?" is you don't have to know the answers to a mate's problems. Nor do you have to be ok yourself. Or feel particularly strong. As long as you feel up to listening, not judging and just talking through stuff you have found useful in the past, you've everything it takes to have a meaningful conversation to support a mate in need.

How to ask

- 1: Ask the question – are you ok?
- 2: Listen without judgement – don't interrupt or rush the conversation.
- 3: Encourage action – visit a doctor or other professional
- 4: Follow up – give a call in a week or two to see how they are doing.

Remember, a conversation could change a life.

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Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis occurs when bones lose their strength and density. They become fragile, weak and brittle, and can fracture (break) more easily. Osteoporosis particularly affects women after menopause and in their later years, although some men are also affected. Activity and a healthy diet rich in calcium and vitamin D can help prevent osteoporosis. Osteoporosis literally means 'bones with holes'. It occurs when bones lose minerals such as calcium more quickly than the body can replace them. Most people don't realise they have osteoporosis until a fracture happens, as there are usually no signs or symptoms. Osteoporosis particularly affects women in their middle and later years, although some men are also affected. If you have osteoporosis, lifestyle changes and medical treatment can prevent further bone loss and reduce your risk of bone fractures.

Risk factors for osteoporosis: There are many risk factors for osteoporosis, some of which you cannot change, such as being female, and having a direct relative who has had an osteoporotic fracture.

Other risk factors include:

- inadequate amounts of dietary calcium
- low vitamin D levels
- cigarette smoking
- alcohol intake of more than two standard drinks per day
- caffeine intake of more than three cups of tea, coffee or equivalent per day
- lack of physical activity
- early menopause (before the age of 45)
- loss of menstrual period if it is associated with reduced production of oestrogen, which is vital for healthy bones (the menstrual cycle can cease following excessive dieting and exercise)
- long-term use of medications such as corticosteroids for rheumatoid arthritis and asthma.

Conditions which place people at a higher risk of osteoporosis include:

- thyroid disease or an overactive thyroid gland
- rheumatoid arthritis
- chronic liver and kidney disease
- conditions that affect the body's ability to absorb nutrients, such as Crohn's disease, coeliac disease and other inflammatory bowel conditions.

Prevention of osteoporosis: Both men and women can take steps from a young age to prevent osteoporosis by making sure that they:

- have a healthy and varied diet with plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains
- eat calcium-rich foods
- absorb enough vitamin D
- avoid smoking
- limit alcohol consumption
- limit caffeine
- do regular weight-bearing and strength-training activities.

Calcium-rich diet and osteoporosis



Enjoying a healthy, balanced diet, with a variety of foods and an adequate intake of calcium, is a vital step to building and maintaining strong, healthy bones. If there is not enough calcium in the blood, your body will take calcium from the bones. Making sure you have enough calcium in your diet is an important way to preserve your bone density. Dairy foods have the highest levels of calcium, but there are many other sources of calcium including sardines, spinach and almonds.



Vitamin D and osteoporosis

Vitamin D and calcium promote bone density. Vitamin D is important because it helps your body absorb the calcium in your diet. We obtain most of our vitamin D from the sun.



Exercise to prevent osteoporosis

Weight-bearing exercise encourages bone density and improves balance so falls are reduced. It does not treat established osteoporosis. Consult your doctor before starting a new exercise program, especially if you have been sedentary, are over 75 years of age or have a medical condition.

Where to get help

- Speak with your doctor
- Arthritis Victoria incorporating Osteoporosis Victoria (03) 8531 8000 or 1800 011 041
- Jean Hailes for Women's Health 1800 JEAN HAILES (1800 532 642)
- Australasian Menopause Society (03) 9428 8738

Source: Jean Hailes for Women's Health
Better Health Channel