

Men and women: How to recognize mental health risk



Different mental illnesses can cause different symptoms in men, women, and young people. As a result, some disorders may be difficult to recognize and diagnose, so it's helpful to recognize the specific symptoms.

Depression

Men and women may feel many of the same symptoms, such as: a continually sad mood; trouble concentrating; a striking change in appetite and energy; feelings of guilt; hopelessness; or worthlessness; lack of interest in life and/or suicidal thoughts, however, they likely behave differently. Women tend to feel sad, cry frequently, express suicidal ideations and withdraw; while men tend to feel angry and irritable, engage in behavioural conflicts and yet not express suicidal feelings. Men dealing with depression may also try harder to hide their symptoms and may be more prone to reckless behaviour or seeking relief through alcohol or drugs.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is caused by experiencing or witnessing a violent, frightening or life-threatening event. People with PTSD often relive the traumatic experience, are on edge, distrustful, have nightmares, and feel emotionally numb and detached. They may also have panic attacks, job and relationship problems, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Although women may feel anxious as a result of PTSD, men may become angry and aggressive and cope by abusing drugs or alcohol. Military personnel, first responders (police, firefighters, and paramedics), doctors, and nurses experience higher rates of PTSD than those in other professions.

Eating Disorders

Although eating disorders – anorexia, bulimia, binge eating – are more common in females, they are affecting more and more men and boys. According to the Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, up to one in four children referred to eating disorders professionals in U.S. is a boy. However, many men delay getting treatment because they feel embarrassed or ashamed to have what is still thought of as a “female” disorder. In addition, binge eating disorders may go unrecognized in males because their overeating is less likely to attract attention.

Looking out for teens

Teenagers are often moody due to ongoing hormonal and physical changes so it can be difficult telling the difference between normal teenage behaviour and symptoms of mental health issues. The challenges both sexes face can feel overwhelming and insurmountable at times, boys are told that it's not okay to express sadness, fear or frustration. This can make them more prone to substance abuse and risky behaviours. However, parents and teachers can be on the alert for certain behaviours that might indicate a mental health issue. These include:

- Decrease in enjoyment and time spent with friends and family
- Trouble coping with regular activities and everyday problems
- Significant decrease in academic performance
- Problems with memory, attention or concentration
- Changes in energy levels, eating or sleeping patterns
- Physical symptoms (stomach aches, headaches, backaches)
- Feelings of hopelessness, sadness, anxiety
- Excessive neglect of personal appearance or hygiene
- Substance abuse
- Seeing or hearing things that others do not

Be aware and seek support

Although mental health challenges can affect men and women in predictably different ways, it's important to note that everyone's experience is unique. If you or someone you care about is struggling with continual anxiety, irritability, depression or any other unusual symptom, talk to your doctor or contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP).