Women and Mental Health

- **Good mental health helps you enjoy life and cope with problems.**

- **It offers a feeling of well-being and inner strength.**

Good mental health is essential for overall well-being. For women, it plays a crucial role in navigating the many demands of daily life.

When mental health is strong, women are better able to manage stress, build healthy relationships, and pursue personal goals.

However, mental health can be affected by a range of factors, including chronic stress, trauma, demands of caregiving and sleep disturbances — all of which can uniquely affect women's mental wellness.

Certain mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders, are more commonly diagnosed in women than in men. This may indicate that women are more likely to seek help for a mental health concern. In addition, some mental health conditions are unique to women, such as:

- **Perinatal depression,** which occurs during or after pregnancy

- **Premenstrual dysphoric disorder,** which occurs around the time of menstruation

- **Perimenopausal depression,** which occurs during the menopause transition

While these challenges can be overwhelming, there are many steps women can take to support and strengthen their mental health on a daily basis.

Ways to Improve Mental Health

Nutrition

Diet can have a direct impact on energy levels and mood. Research shows that nutritious foods support emotional well-being, and a balanced intake of nutrients — including fiber and water — can help stabilize mood.

A healthy diet includes a variety of foods from all major food groups, provides essential nutrients, supports a healthy weight, and limits excess fat, sugar, salt, and alcohol.

Choosing foods that provide energy supports both physical health and mental well-being. Because dietary needs vary, it is important to consult a healthcare professional to determine what works best for each individual.

Exercise

Physical activity supports mental and physical health. Regular movement is associated with improved mood, reduced stress, and better sleep.

At least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity daily is recommended, along with strength training twice a week to maintain muscle mass. Consult a doctor before starting any new exercise routine, especially if you have a health condition.

Aerobic exercise increases endorphin levels—chemicals that relieve stress and promote calm. It may also reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, support better sleep, and help prevent weight gain.

Sleep

Sleep plays a vital role in both physical and mental health. Adequate rest can improve mood and help prevent various health issues. For women, quality sleep is especially important, as they are more likely to experience insomnia, restless leg syndrome, and sleep apnea.

Hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and menopause can also disrupt sleep patterns.

Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night, though pregnant women may require more. Strategies to improve sleep include:

- Following a routine to help relax and wind down before sleep, such as reading a book, or taking a bath.

- Avoiding lighted screens such as a laptop or cell phone before bed.

- Avoiding naps after 3:00 pm.

Stress and Mental Health

Stress is the body's response to change or challenge. In small doses, it can be helpful—boosting alertness and providing energy to meet demands. However, chronic stress can lead to serious health problems over time.

Women are more likely than men to report physical symptoms of stress, such as headaches and digestive issues. They also face a higher risk of mental health conditions that can be intensified by stress, including depression and anxiety. Research shows that women tend to experience stress symptoms more frequently than men. While the exact reasons aren't fully understood, differences in how stress hormones are processed in the body may play a role.

Managing stress is a key part of maintaining good mental health. Recognizing its effects and finding healthy ways to cope can help protect both emotional well-being and overall wellness.

Mental Disorders Can Be Treated

A primary care provider is a good place to start when seeking help. They can discuss health options with you and provide a referral to a qualified mental health professional—such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or clinical social worker—who can assist with determining appropriate next steps.

Remember to always make time for yourself

It is important to take care of yourself. No matter how busy you are, try to set aside at least 15 minutes each day in your schedule to do something for yourself, like taking a bubble bath, going for a walk, or a calling a friend.

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