

Emotional Well-Being

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Emotional well-being is a critical aspect of your inner life. Having a sense of being “okay” emotionally is related to attaining inner harmony. External conditions assist in achieving a balanced state of mind. Having stable relationships, job security, perceiving that you have options, and believing that you can maintain your personal autonomy as you make life choices, add to this. If you feel trapped or limited in your options, you may make yourself vulnerable to feeling anxious and depressed. One’s ability to adapt to changes, maintain a flexible approach to life, and have realistic expectations for self and others, tends to make an individual stronger emotionally. Creating balance within work and family life so that both can nurture your sense of your world as a positive place for you is essential in attaining wellness.

Mood Influencers

Some things that cause you to experience stress come from your perception of external events. Other stressors arise from within and are internally generated. Things happen, but it is how our minds interpret situations that will determine our reactions. The way you conceptualize your world and yourself is affected by changes in your psychology and physiology. Some stressors have a temporary effect, and others have a lasting impact. We can see this in the following examples: Someone from your child’s school calls and tells you that your child had a bad day. Either you simply handle this event, or you make yourself feel down about it. You are decorating your house for an upcoming party, and you discover that the plumbing in your guest bathroom isn’t functioning properly. You have a deadline at work, and your computer’s hard drive crashes. You are experiencing conflict over whether you should stay in a long-term, somewhat comfortable relationship with someone whom you are no longer passionate about. You notice that you are reacting to others in an impatient manner, and you are experiencing “crying jags” when watching a comedy on TV, just before you get your period. Your doctor suspects that you may be becoming diabetic, or you have just found out that your headaches are migraines. Stress can evoke depression, anxiety or other mood states. How you interpret these occurrences, conflicts, and changes determines the degree to which you become depressed or anxious.

Mood Disorders

Mood disorders, sometimes referred to as affective disorders, are ongoing emotional states that interfere significantly with daily functioning. Mood disorders are most commonly related to depression or anxiety, and some people experience both. You may be temporarily sad, “down,” or tense, but this does not indicate a mood disorder.

Your feelings become problematic when they last for some time and get in the way of your regular routine. A feeling may be unpleasant, but it may be nothing more than a momentary feeling known as a transient mood state. It could also be a symptom of something else that you have to cope with, such as physical illness, grief over a significant loss, or an indication that you are dreading something undesirable. If you find yourself depressed or anxious for a prolonged period of time, however, you may be suffering from a mood disorder, and you may need some form of treatment.

Depression

Clinical depression causes difficulty for about one out of every four adults at some time during their lifetime. Depression can be considered a mood state, a syndrome, or simply a symptom. How it is considered depends in large part on its severity and the degree to which it is interfering with ordinary functioning. The risk of death from depression is higher than that of breast cancer. So it is important to consider the seriousness of this disorder.

The most common factors among people who are clinically depressed are prior depressive episodes, a family history of depression, being a female with ovarian hormonal fluctuations, and/or having high levels of stress or trauma.

Some of the symptoms of depression are:

- Sadness
- A persistent down mood
- Loss of interest in normally pleasurable activities
- Changes in sleep patterns, appetite, and/or sexual desire
- Poor concentration
- Narrowing of attention span
- Thoughts of suicide
- Feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy
- Hopelessness
- Fatigue

Individuals who experience these symptoms in an intense and ongoing way, at levels that interfere with social and occupational functioning, are likely to be suffering from depression.

Anxiety

Like depression, anxiety can be considered a mood state, a syndrome, or simply a symptom. If you are experiencing tension, it may come from ordinary events. You may also experience a level of excitement, like “butterflies” or the feeling of falling in love. You may feel a temporary rush when you attempt something that you have never done before. Normally, people rebound from these feelings quickly. If the emotions are sustained for a long period, they may become troublesome. You are said to be clinically anxious when you are experiencing fear or dread to a degree that interferes with your ability to perform your normal activities. Your concern may be general, or “free-floating,” or it may be highly specific, as in various phobias. Your anxiety may come in the form of “panic attacks.” In addition, feeling anxious may be a warning sign that you have some medical situation that needs attention.

Some of the symptoms of anxiety are:

- Excessive anxiety and worry
- Restlessness or feeling “on edge”
- Being easily fatigued
- Having difficulty concentrating or having the mind go blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance

Ways to Work with Your Emotions

Keep a record

This can assist you in answering the question, “What moods do I experience?” Work on becoming sensitive to the subtle changes that your body and mind undergo throughout the day. Record events, such as significant things that occur at work, your home life, your inner conflicts, menstrual cycles, onset of medical conditions, and so on. Make notes as to any changes in your medications and any change in dosage.

Tell others

You may want to try to share your awareness of changes in your psychology with others whom you trust or with whom you want to relate closely. Your family, friends, coworkers, physician, psychologist, and other health-care providers can give you important information about how they perceive you, your moods, and your behaviors. They may have input into treatments that you might consider. Ask for research findings from the health-care providers you work with.

Analyze your strengths and try new approaches

Reflect on what approaches you use to cope with your changing moods. You may decide to change or discontinue some things that you do, or to put more energy into others. If you have any doubts about recommended approaches, seek additional opinions, read, and attend relevant seminars or lectures.

Ask for help

You may consult with your friends, family, physician, psychologist, psychiatrist, physical trainer, acupuncturist or other health care providers in order to develop a program for yourself. Remember that there is no “right way” to work with your symptoms. Make your own decisions based on the best information that you can gather. Empowering yourself does not mean following others’ advice blindly, but taking it into account as you commit yourself to action that feels good to you.