

Mental Health

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What do you do when you're stressed? How do you know you are stressed?
- Will you describe the last time you were mad?
- Tell me about the last time you and your partner got into a fight.
- Within the last year, have you been hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically injured by another person?

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is the term used to describe a person's overall emotional health. A person who is considered emotionally healthy has a balance between his or her physical, spiritual and environmental health. This allows the person to feel good about herself, have positive feelings towards others, express feelings, verbalize thoughts, enjoy time with family and friends and develop a good support system for requesting and receiving help.

Motherhood and Mental Health

What are Baby Blues?

Baby Blues is the name given to the sadness that mothers feel in the first few days or weeks after giving birth. This condition, which occurs in about 80 percent of women, is believed to be caused by a combination of stress and hormonal changes associated with having a new baby. Symptoms often include: sudden mood swings, sadness, crying spells, loss of appetite, irritability, anxiety, restlessness, trouble sleeping and feelings of loneliness. The symptoms usually go away with time, so women should seek medical advice if these feelings do not disappear after two weeks.

What is Postpartum Depression?

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a condition that can occur anytime within the first year after giving birth; symptoms are similar to the baby blues but do not go away within a few weeks' time. About 15 to 20 percent of new mothers require treatment before being able to function normally throughout the day. This number increases to 50 to 80 percent if the mother has previously had PPD. If untreated, PPD can get worse and in one to two percent of cases, develop into psychosis.

What are the symptoms of PPD?

- Exhaustion
- Severe insomnia
- Changes in appetite
- Loss of sexual interest
- Crying spells without obvious cause
- Guilt, sadness, and anger
- Despair and/ or feelings of worthlessness
- Forgetfulness
- Indecisiveness

- Inability to concentrate
- Desperation or feelings of hopelessness
- Withdrawal
- Obsessive/compulsive behavior

What is Postpartum Psychosis?

Postpartum psychosis is a rare, yet severe, mental illness that usually occurs within six weeks of delivery. Symptoms include: hallucinations and loss of reality, delusions, inability to sleep, unsettled or angry feelings, unusual behavior and suicidal or homicidal thoughts. If you or anyone you know is experiencing these symptoms, you should contact a doctor immediately.

Anger & Stress Management

Anger and Stress are Normal

We all have occasional frustrations as a result of dealing with difficult friends, family members, co-workers or events that we can't control. However, anger and stress management are not the same thing.

Anger management means learning to control your response to certain events or situations that upset you, while stress management means making lifestyle changes to avoid stressful situations. Even though you can't get rid of these problems, you can take control of how these things affect you.

Dealing with Anger

You may have trouble dealing with anger if you become increasingly irritable or take unhealthy risks like drinking too much or abusing drugs. To prevent anger from building up, try these techniques:

- Talk about your feelings. Letting someone close to you know when something is bothering you can prevent you from losing your temper.
- Think before you act. Anticipate the consequences of your words and actions before you say or do something out of anger.
- Balance your work, home and school life.
- Take care of your health. Your physical health can affect your emotional health. Remember, exercise is great for your physical health and stress relief!
- Listen to self-help books on tape (available at the Public Library.)
- Listen to relaxing instrumental music.

Dealing with Stress

Unlike anger responses which tend to follow an upsetting event, stress is a feeling that builds up over time. We all feel stress when we have too much to do, too many responsibilities, too much work and feel exhausted. Our bodies help us cope with these situations by making stress hormones. To reduce your stress level, try these techniques:

- Learn to say no. If you feel overwhelmed, don't take on any more tasks.
- Try to relax yourself with techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or massage.
- Exercise and eat a healthy diet.
- Get plenty of sleep.

- Limit the amount of caffeine and alcohol you consume.

Handling Anger & Stress

Anger and stress are normal emotions, but they can cause lots of problems at work, home and in your personal life. The natural way to deal with anger is to respond aggressively. However, unexpressed or pent up anger can also lead to aggressive behavior. Anger management tricks can help you suppress and redirect anger.

Here are some steps you can try the next time you get angry:

- Take a long, deep breath.
- Slowly repeat a calm word like "relax" or "take it easy" to yourself.
- Do a small exercise or stretch to help calm yourself down.
- Remind yourself that getting angry won't fix anything.

Stress and Pregnancy

Stress is the way your body reacts to something that is unusual or dangerous. It can lead to medical problems like high blood pressure or depression.

Here are some ways to deal with stress:

- Remove yourself from the situation that is stressing you out
- Have fun
- Talk to someone about what's going on
- Avoid things that you know make you feel stressed
- Avoid making major life decisions
- Take a break, get comfortable and rest

Sometimes feelings of stress and anger can linger, even after you've tried the above techniques.

Here are a couple ways to deal with longer lasting stress and anger:

- Talk to someone about your feelings
- Take care of your health
- Learn to say no so that you don't get overwhelmed
- Get plenty of sleep
- Limit the amount of caffeine and alcohol you consume
- Help someone else (this gives you a sense of control and takes your mind off of the situation)

Depression

Depression is a common illness that negatively effects how a person thinks, feels and acts. Although it's very treatable, many cases go untreated because they're not diagnosed.

Symptoms of depression:

- Feeling restless or annoyed

- Feeling sad, hopeless or overwhelmed
- Crying a lot
- No energy
- Eating too much or not enough
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Difficulty focusing or remembering
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Lost interest in favorite activities
- Withdrawal from friends or family

Here are some tips to help you deal with depression:

- Get plenty of rest
- Stop putting pressure on yourself
- Ask for help around the house and with nighttime feedings
- Have a friend or family member help you for part of the day
- Talk about how you're feeling
- Don't spend lots of time alone
- Leave the house
- Spend quality time with your partner
- Talk with other mothers
- Join a local support group

Please see your physician if you are experiencing these symptoms.

Eating Disorders

There is a strong link between eating disorders and depression. There are three major eating disorders that often go along with depression and anxiety.

- **Anorexia Nervosa**

People with Anorexia have a distorted body image, which causes them to see themselves as overweight even though they're dangerously thin. They usually refuse to eat and exercise compulsively

- **Bulimia Nervosa**

People with Bulimia eat huge amounts of food, then purge (by throwing up, taking laxatives, enemas, and/or exercising) in order to get rid of the calories they just consumed. They are usually ashamed of this habit, but continue doing it because tension is removed when their stomachs are empty again.

- **Binge Eating**

Much like Bulimia, people who suffer from binge eating have out-of-control eating spells. However, they do not use a method of purging to get rid of the calories.

If you think you are depressed or have an eating disorder, contact your doctor to be diagnosed.