

How Men's Mental Health Impacts Physical Health

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Transcript

Dr. Ryan Van Lieshout: When men are struggling with their mental health, it often shows up physically long before we talk about it. In fact, 1 in 5 men will face a serious mental health challenge this year, with these being particularly common during big life shifts, like becoming a new dad, losing a job or relationship, or entering retirement.

I'm Dr. Ryan Van Lieshout, a psychiatrist and professor at McMaster University. I want you to know why there is no health without mental health, and why the strong, silent type may be the one carrying the biggest burden.

So, why don't men talk about their mental health or seek help for it? For many men, traditional masculine ideals tell us we always need to be stoic and self-reliant. We also often fear that showing sadness or vulnerability makes us look weak or a burden on others. So, instead of saying something, we just keep going until our bodies start to give out.

Since men can also sometimes lack the emotional vocabulary to describe their mental health, it's important to know the signs.

For men, things like depression don't always look the way we'd expect. For many, it isn't about being sad and lying in bed; it can manifest as other forms of escapism, like burying oneself in work or withdrawing socially. These also can show up as more emotional volatility. If you find you're more short-tempered, reckless or unusually irritable, that's a red flag.

Other warning signs can include hopelessness, losing one's sense of humour or interest in things you used to enjoy, increased alcohol or substance use, or making statements like "I'm stuck" or "I'm done." Ongoing physical pain with no clear cause, more sleep problems or constant fatigue are also often physical manifestations.

The good news is that small, practical steps can be really helpful. Getting good sleep, being physically active, reducing alcohol or substance use, maintaining daily structure and staying connected to even one supportive person can make a real difference.

So, reach out to a friend, join a sports league, sign up for a support group or talk to your doctor or a therapist.

If you're supporting someone else, listen without trying to fix them. Just normalize the conversation, but be persistent in helping them find professional support like their doctor, the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy Program or calling or texting the 9-8-8 mental health crisis line.

Remember, when a man gets the help he needs, it doesn't just benefit him; it can transform his family, his workplace and his entire community.

Let's start looking out for one another, inside and out.

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