**MENtal health matters**

*Did you know that across the world suicide rates are 3 to 4 times higher in men compared to women[[1]](#footnote-1)? This points to the importance of better understanding and better supporting men’s mental health.*

Mental health conditions are increasing worldwide with substantial effects on all areas of our life, from performance at school and work, to relationships with our colleagues, friends and loved ones – and even bad effects on our physical health. According to the World Health Organization, two of the most common mental health conditions – depression and anxiety – cost the global economy US$ 1 trillion each year[[2]](#footnote-2).

**The silent struggle**

While mental health affects everyone, men face unique challenges when it comes to mental health due to societal expectations and stereotypes. Characteristics typically associated with masculinity, like emotional toughness, resilience and self-reliance, often make it more difficult for men to express their emotions and seek out help. The result? Mental health issues go unnoticed and untreated, until it’s too late.

Reports by Anxiety & Depression Association of America show that nearly 1 in 10 men experience some form of depression or anxiety … but less than half ever seek treatment[[3]](#footnote-3).

**Always feeling tired?**

**Sad?**

**Hopeless?**

Typical symptoms of a mental health condition include extreme fatigue, difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much, feeling sad, hopeless or empty, not getting pleasure from activities you usually enjoy and even suicidal thoughts. These are experienced similarly across genders[[4]](#footnote-4). But, men may experience some additional, unique symptoms and develop different coping tools. Mayo Clinic reports that when depression (one of the biggest mental health conditions) occurs in men, it may be masked by unhealthy coping behaviours[[5]](#footnote-5).

Symptoms in men may include:

* Escapist behaviour such as spending a lot of time at work or on sports
* Physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive problems and pain
* Misuse of alcohol and/or drugs
* Controlling, violent or abusive behaviour
* Anger, irritability or aggressiveness
* Risky behaviour such as reckless driving
* Noticeable changes in mood, energy level or appetite
* Difficulty concentrating, feeling restless or on edge

**Let’s talk about treatment**

It’s time to stand up to the stigma and prioritise mental health support for men. Here are our top 5 recommendations to build into your life for better mental health:

1. **Prioritise social connections:** peer support groups, support from friends and family and community resources provide valuable emotional support and a sense of belonging. These connections also provide great opportunities for social activities and hobbies.
2. **Practise mindfulness:** paying attention to the present can be particularly beneficial for mental health. It helps to reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, enhance self-awareness, improve focus, increase resilience and manage depression and anxiety.
3. **Exercise often:** exercise has a significant positive impact on mental health and overall wellbeing. It boosts mood, reduces stress, improves sleep, increases energy levels, boosts self-esteem and body image, and has several cognitive benefits such as better focus, attention and memory. Taking part in group exercises also comes with the added benefit of building those all-important social connections.
4. **Eat healthy:** you are (and feel) what you eat. Focus on fresh whole foods and limit your intake of alcohol, highly processed foods and refined carbohydrates.
5. **Try talk therapy:** this widely used approach can help you better understand your thoughts, emotions and behaviours and develop healthy coping strategies – everyone needs to vent or open up every so often and doing this in a safe space is critical.

If you find that these lifestyle changes do not make much of a difference, have a conversation with your doctor. They may recommend a different type of therapy, medication or other lifestyle changes to help you feel better. The biggest tip is to speak about what you are feeling, and remember that a problem shared is a problem halved.

*For more information about Vitality’s evidence-based approach that encourages and rewards members for healthier living, visit the*[*Vitality Global*](https://www.vitalityglobal.com/)*website.*

1. WHO. Suicide in the world. [Link](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/326948/WHO-MSD-MER-19.3-eng.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. WHO. Mental health. [Link](https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ADAA. Men’s mental health. [Link](https://adaa.org/find-help/by-demographics/mens-mental-health) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Medical News Today Common symptoms of depression: what to know. [Link](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/326769) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mayo Clinic. Male depression: understating the issues. [Link](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/male-depression/art-20046216)  [↑](#footnote-ref-5)