

Liptember - Women and Mental Health

Every September, flaunting some colourful lipstick won't necessarily just be a fashion statement — it can also make a positive impact. The month's long Liptember campaign is hoping that fun lipstick will help spark a conversation on women's mental health.

WOMEN AND MENTAL HEALTH

In 2022, the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing reported that four in 10 Australians aged 16 to 85 suffered an anxiety, depression or substance abuse disorder during the previous financial year.

While mental health is important for all genders, women can suffer from certain mental health conditions at higher rates than men due to biological and gender-related differences.

Biological differences include:

1. Menstruation.
2. Menopause.
3. Pregnancy and birth.
4. Different forms of cancers such as cervical cancer.

Socioeconomic, political and cultural factors include:

1. Women are more likely to be carers, which can lead to stress, anxiety and isolation.
2. Physical and mental abuse, which can have a long-term impact on their mental health.

3. Sexual violence, which can cause mental health issues including PTSD.
4. Unequal economic and social conditions also contribute to women's higher risk of depression.

One of the key goals of Liptember is to help fund gender specific mental health research that will pave the way for female-centric (or womxn-centric) methodologies when developing new approaches to mental illness prevention, diagnosis, treatment, support services and programs.

IMPROVING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

While raising awareness and checking in on another person's mental health is always important, it's also imperative that you think about your own feelings. Devote some of your time to self-care, which can include:

- Improving the quality of your sleep.
- Paying more attention to your diet.
- Increasing the amount of exercise you do.
- Practicing mindfulness via meditation, breathing exercises or writing in a gratitude diary.
- Spending more time with supportive people like your friends or family.
- Talking about things you feel sad or anxious about with a trusted person.
- Talking with a mental health professional if your feelings are impacting your everyday life.

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Doing these activities over a period of time can not only boost the regular production of feel-good hormones such as dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin, it can better prepare you for future external shocks that can make you feel down or anxious. Furthermore, if your wellbeing is generally good and you feel content with your own life, you're more likely to be empathetic and sensitive towards other people and their feelings.

HELPING WOMEN IN YOUR LIFE

While short term feelings of stress, anger or sadness are common and not always a sign of a mental illness, you may have noticed changes in someone you know that are out of the ordinary. They may appear:

- more anxious
- irritable,
- argumentative or
- sleep deprived than usual.

Whether it's your sister, daughter, mother, aunt, or friend, let her know that it's okay to talk about any difficulties she's having. A conversation on the subject can be started by simply asking: "Are you okay?". It's important to try and try and initiate a discussion when you are both relaxed and have time to talk. And remember, their natural reaction may be defensive, so:

- be calm,
- be patient and
- be sympathetic.

If they admit that stress, anxiety or other symptoms seem to be making it hard for them to cope as well as usual, recommend they talk to their GP or a mental health professional.

HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN HELP SUPPORT WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

While individuals can advocate for mental health awareness in the workplace, the drive must come from leaders, managers, and HR. It can be achieved by:

1. Providing mental health training and offering tools and strategies to navigate workplace mental health, such as how to have difficult conversations and cultivating mentally healthy cultures. Ensure all employees have access to mental health resources and regularly communicate about the mental health benefits available via email or promotional posters. If applicable, leaders should try and normalise using these services by sharing if they have personally found the services useful.
2. Naming mental health advocacy in relevant policies and incorporating it into organisational practices. These policies might include paid leave, or flexible hours. Leaders should also rectify any structural issues that discriminate against women such as pay inequity or lack of consequences for harassment.
3. Fostering a sustainable working environment by increasing employee autonomy and minimising unrealistic workloads. Women are often caregivers, so leaders should build in as much flexibility as possible. Every woman and every individual will need something different, be it remote work or flexible hours.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED IN LIPTEMBER

Taking part in this year's Liptember is easy, simply:

1. **Put on some lipstick.** Showing off a bright lipstick colour is the key physical symbol of the campaign.
2. **Take a moment to think about your own mental health.** The month's overall goal is raising awareness of women's mental health, so before checking in on any of your friends, family or co-workers, think about how you're feeling. In this stressful world, it's important we dial up the self-care, whether that's a going for a run, calling a friend, or turning your phone off and taking a bubble bath.
3. **Post #Liptember on social media.** Check out the Liptember website at <https://www.liptember.com.au> for downloadable social media guides. A big part of the event's mission is raising awareness, so spreading the word on social media can go a long way! The website also has a built-in fundraising profile, so you can raise money for a good cause.

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