

- Women—mental health

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING IN EACH STAGE OF A WOMAN'S LIFE

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ONE of the most pressing issues in healthcare today is mental health. Unique issues related to the mental health of girls and women are of particular importance.



As we celebrate women this month, let's also celebrate how our bodies change and move in every season.

Below, Dr Phathokuhle Zondi shares her thoughts on the importance of embracing every stage of womanhood.

Go with the flow

The physical, mental, and social changes that occur in the teenage years can be confusing and challenging for adolescents and parents alike.

Encourage your daughter to be aware of how her body changes with age and, once she reaches menarche, how she responds to hormone fluctuations throughout the month. Girls may feel strong and energetic or sluggish and bloated depending on where they are in their cycle.

Understanding these shifts, adapting activity accordingly, and being able to communicate this is valuable.

During these years, adolescents also begin to struggle for independence as they increase their ability to think abstractly and plan and set goals.

In order to foster physical and social ability, encourage your teenage daughter to take on new challenges, vocalise their struggles, think independently, and find healthy emotional outlets.

In these years, physical activity contributes to emotional regulation and body positivity, and reduces risky behaviour.

Colour outside the lines

The 20s present a new set of challenges and joys for women navigating relationships, careers, and life. These are the years of social exploration, professional development, and career progression. In these years, we generally live life flat out: we work hard, we play hard, we love hard, and we fail hard.

Remaining physically active in these years helps prevent depression, helps manage anxiety, and makes us more likely to engage in positive behaviour – resulting in a better social life and improved productivity.

Importantly, managing one's diet, moderating alcohol consumption, and staying physically active will help lower the costs of healthcare later in life.

Exercise is medicine

By the time you've stumbled out of your 20s, figured yourself out in your 30s and 40s, and crested into your 50s if you haven't been taking care of your health, the cracks soon start to show.

Diseases of chronic lifestyle, cancer, and mental illness tend to announce themselves painfully in this stage.

The good news is that numerous clinical studies have shown that physical activity can effectively reduce risk, improve quality of life, and lower complications in many chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular illness.

EXERCISE is medicine.

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When it comes to cancer, breathing exercises, yoga and mindfulness are increasingly being used in various aspects of cancer management to alleviate the anxiety related to the diagnosis.

Furthermore, various randomised control trials have demonstrated aerobic exercise improves anxiety, depression, fatigue, quality of life, and physical function in cancer survivors.

I am who I am, and that is my superpower

While the 20s are years of self-discovery, the 30s and 40s are common years of self-actualisation. During self-discovery, one realises the dynamics of their personality, becomes more certain about their likes and dislikes, and often starts to set boundaries. Self-actualisation is a progression from self-realisation and involves self-development and selfmastery.

It happens when you start to realise your full potential.

Numerous studies have shown that in adults, higher levels of physical activity are related to higher scale scores of mastery, self-control, and vitality.

In this season, staying active will help you realise your full potential.