

# A GUIDE TO MENTAL HEALTH AND PITUITARY DISORDERS



## MENTAL HEALTH AND PITUITARY DISORDERS

The pituitary gland influences the entire body, which is why it's sometimes called the 'master gland'. Pituitary disorders can affect many areas of the body and cause a range of symptoms.

People with pituitary problems may experience various physical symptoms. However, a pituitary gland that doesn't work properly can also affect mental health – both directly and indirectly. Mental health problems, especially depression and anxiety, are a common in the community, and they are also reported in those with pituitary disorders.

## HOW PITUITARY DISORDERS DIRECTLY AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH

Pituitary hormones play a crucial role in regulating mood, cognition, and behaviour. Hormone imbalances caused by pituitary disorders can directly lead to:

- depression
- anxiety
- irritability
- cognitive difficulties such as 'brain fog'
- personality changes.

Research shows people with hypopituitarism have a significantly higher risk of developing depression and anxiety disorders compared to the general population.

There is also evidence that people may experience emotional changes after pituitary surgery, which can include:

- fatigue
- depression and anxiety
- sleep disturbances and daytime sleepiness.

## HOW PITUITARY DISORDERS INDIRECTLY AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH

Even if hormone levels are restored to 'normal' levels through treatment, living with a chronic health condition like a pituitary disorder can take a toll on your wellbeing. For example:

- feeling a sense of loss or grief after being given a diagnosis
- worry about how your condition will impact your health
- anxiety associated with regular tests and scans
- fear about surgical treatment and its long-term impact
- ongoing stress of managing a complex medical condition
- dealing with changes in physical appearance
- being told you may not be able to have children
- ongoing impact your condition has on your ability to work
- experiencing a reduced quality of life or limitations on daily activities
- financial strain from medical costs
- relationship challenges.

## HOW TO MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Living with a pituitary condition can be challenging but there is a lot you can do to look after your mental health and emotional wellbeing. People with positive mindset and good coping strategies in life tend to report less emotional distress.

### **Learn about your condition**

Fear of the unknown can cause you to catastrophise (think your situation is worse than it actually is or imagine worst case scenarios). However, learning about your condition, how it will affect you, what to expect and how to manage it can reduce uncertainty about your condition.

Work with your doctor

Work closely with your doctor and follow your treatment plan. The right treatment will help balance your hormones and reduce the direct impact hormonal imbalances have on mental health.

### **See a mental health professional**

Consider seeing a mental health professional for additional support. This may be helpful when you are first diagnosed, or on an ongoing basis, to help you manage day-to-day stresses and learn strategies for coping.

### **Eat a healthy diet**

It's important to eat a healthy diet as good nutrition is linked with better stress management, concentration and improved mental health. Focus on eating unprocessed foods such as fruits and vegetables, wholegrains, lean meat, chicken and fish, and healthy oils such as those found in oily fish, avocados, nuts and seeds. Avoid highly processed foods with added fats, salt and sugar.

### **Exercise regularly**

It's important to prioritise regular exercise and movement throughout your week. Regular physical activity not only improves the functioning of the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis but improves mental health as well. Studies have shown that physical activity helps with sleep and is associated with a better mood and quality of life.

### **Reduce stress**

Taking steps to reduce stress can be very beneficial. Make time for things you enjoy doing and consider learning relaxation and mindfulness techniques such as meditation.

### **Get enough sleep**

Sleep and mood are closely connected with poor sleep linked to irritability, stress and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

### **Build a support network**

Let family, friends and work colleagues know about your condition and the kinds of support you may need from time to time.

## Join a support group

It can be helpful to join a support group to connect with others who understand exactly what you are going through. This can help you feel less alone, and you may discover other ways of coping that have been helpful for others.

## Be kind to yourself

Be realistic about how your condition impacts you and what you need to do to manage your physical and mental wellbeing. Avoid putting too much pressure on yourself or giving yourself a hard time because you have a health condition.

## WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER SUPPORT AND HELP

There are many places you can go for ongoing support and help.

### **Australian Pituitary Foundation: [www.pituitary.asn.au](http://www.pituitary.asn.au)**

- information and resources on pituitary conditions
- online support series.

### **The Pituitary Foundation: [www.pituitary.org.uk](http://www.pituitary.org.uk)**

- information and resources on pituitary conditions, including "The psychological impact of a pituitary condition" booklet
- online counselling for members

### **Hormones Australia: [www.hormones-australia.org.au](http://www.hormones-australia.org.au)**

- information and resources on pituitary conditions

### **Acromunity (Acromegaly information and support): <https://www.acromunity.com.au/>**

- information and resources on acromegaly
- patient support groups

### **Beyond Blue: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)**

- information and resources on mental health conditions
- helplines and support

### **Headspace (for youth): [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)**

- mental health support for young people

### **Australian Psychological Society: <https://psychology.org.au/>**

- find a psychologist near you
- 

Remember, mental health challenges related to pituitary disorders are common and treatable. Don't hesitate to reach out for professional help if you're struggling. With proper medical care and support, it's possible to effectively manage both the physical and mental health impacts of pituitary disorders.

## MORE INFORMATION

The Australian Pituitary Foundation provides social support for patients and carers, and has published a range of patient resources on pituitary conditions and treatments.

**For more information, please visit our website: [www.pituitary.asn.au](http://www.pituitary.asn.au)**

**Email: [support@pituitary.asn.au](mailto:support@pituitary.asn.au)**

**Phone: 1300 331 807**

## REFERENCES

1. Wei IH, Huang CC. Risk of Mental Illnesses in Patients With Hypopituitarism: A Nationwide Population-Based Cohort Study. *Psychiatry Investig.* 2022;19(6):418-426. doi:10.30773/pi.2022.0010
2. Zhang J, Wang Y, Xu X, Gu Y, Huang F, Zhang M. Postoperative complications and quality of life in patients with pituitary adenoma. *Gland Surg.* 2020;9(5):1521-1529. doi:10.21037/gs-20-690

**Acknowledgement** – We are grateful to the members of the Australian Pituitary Foundation for reviewing this information.

**Disclaimer** – The information in this guide, whether provided by the Australian Pituitary Foundation or a third party, is provided as a general guide and is not intended to replace professional health advice. Please consult your endocrinologist if you have any concern about your treatment or are experiencing side effects. The Australian Pituitary Foundation, nor a third party, does not accept liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred using or relying on the information in this production.

**This fact sheet is proudly endorsed by:**

