

# Could Mental Health Issues Be Hurting Your Marriage?

By Jonathan Swinton, LDS Licensed Marriage and Family, 21 Sep 2011

*If you, your spouse, or both of you are struggling with mental health issues, it is likely placing undue stress on your marriage.*

Could mental health issues be negatively influencing your marriage? Have you or your spouse ever been diagnosed with a mental health problem? If not, have you ever checked to see if you or your spouse have any symptoms?

Mental health problems are much more common than most people realize. The most recent estimates indicate that approximately 25 percent of adults experience depression problems, 30 percent of adults experience anxiety problems, and even more experience excessive levels of stress. In the high pressure world we live in, these problems are increasing in prevalence.



From the perspective of a marriage counselor, this is very concerning because research has shown that if either spouse is struggling with mental health issues, your marriage may be negatively impacted. In fact, research has indicated that if mental health issues preceded your relationship problems, your relationship will never fully recover until the mental health issues are under control. Similarly, if marital problems preceded the mental health problems, resolving the relationship problems may be a key to improving mental health. With as common as mental health issues are, the chances of one spouse experiencing struggles with mental health problems is very high.

## **How do I know if I have mental health issues?**

To help you with this, page 3 is a quick screener for depression, anxiety, and excessive stress for you and your spouse to take. It is also online at <http://tinyurl.com/3pjf9q6>. If you score above the normal range, it may be wise to seek further assessment from a competent professional. A high score on the assessment is not meant to be a diagnosis of mental health problems, rather, it is meant to help you see what may need further assessment.

## **What can I do if I do struggle with mental health issues?**

First of all, remain positive. Most mental health issues are very manageable. Here are some things you can do to resolve the mental health symptoms:

Seek help in counseling/therapy: Counseling can be extremely helpful. In fact, therapists are among the most competent to accurately diagnose mental health issues. There is often a stigma associated with counseling in our society. This is unfortunate because competent therapists have been shown to be extremely helpful in helping people find ways to overcome mental health and marital problems. As a competent therapist, I would be happy to help you with your mental health and marital problems. Feel free to visit my website for more information: [www.swintoncounseling.com](http://www.swintoncounseling.com).

Get a full physical with blood work: Many mental health symptoms are not really mental health problems. Rather, they may be an indication of an underlying physiological condition, such as thyroid or other problems. The first thing I suggest to my clients that show mental health symptoms is to get a full physical to rule out potential physiological causes. It is also common that other medications you are taking could be causing your symptoms. Your doctor can help you rule this out.

Try appropriate medications: Mental health issues have been proven to often have biological components such as serotonin imbalances. Medications that have been released in recent years are extremely

helpful at targeting these issues and have very few side effects. Many have the incorrect assumption that mental health medications such as antidepressants will be addictive, change their personality, or make them feel weird all the time. This is simply not the case. They are extremely effective at only targeting the biological issue, most are not habit forming, and have negligible side effects. If you are not comfortable with medications, there are several natural remedies that can also be helpful. Talk to your doctor for more information.

Start a regular daily exercise program: Research has shown that consistent daily exercise can be as effective as taking an antidepressant. Don't set unrealistic goals for exercise. Just try to get your heart rate up for 15 minutes a day 5 times per week.

Get enough sleep: I worked with a sleep specialist when I was employed as a therapist at a well-respected medical school. The specialist showed me evidence that most people don't get enough sleep, and this can contribute to mental health problems. The specialist indicated that people need a minimum of 7.5 – 9 hours of sleep per night. That means that some people need at least 9 hours of sleep to be in good health. It also means that anyone that says they need less than 7.5 hours of sleep likely doesn't realize they would be healthier with more sleep.

Best case scenario is to do all of the above: Research has shown that people that do all of the above-listed items will resolve their mental health issues more quickly than just doing some of them.

I suggest that all couples be screened for mental health issues. You may not realize that things can feel better than they do now with some simple professional help. Visit the link provided above to make sure you and your spouse are doing well. It may be the key to keeping your marriage strong forever.

*Is there a general marriage or family relationship issue that you would like our relationship expert Jonathan Swinton to address in future columns? If so, send him an email at [jonathan@swintoncounseling.com](mailto:jonathan@swintoncounseling.com).*

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*Jonathan Swinton is an LDS Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. He is an approved LDS Family Services Referred Provider, accepts Bishop referrals, and is available to provide marriage and family therapy services and weekend couple retreats to anyone interested. He is also available to speak on marriage issues at Relief Society and Ward events. Contact him at Swinton Counseling: 801-647-9951, [www.swintoncounseling.com](http://www.swintoncounseling.com).*

## DEPRESSION ANXIETY STRESS SCALES (21)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you **over the past week**. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0: Did not apply to me at all

1: Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time

2: Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of the time

3: Applied to me very much, or most of the time

1. I found it hard to wind down	0	1	2	3
2. I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0	1	2	3
3. I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	0	1	2	3
4. I experienced breathing difficulty (eg, excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0	1	2	3
5. I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0	1	2	3
6. I tended to over-react to situations	0	1	2	3
7. I experienced trembling (eg, in the hands)	0	1	2	3
8. I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0	1	2	3
9. I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	0	1	2	3
10. I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0	1	2	3
11. I found myself getting agitated	0	1	2	3
12. I found it difficult to relax	0	1	2	3
13. I felt down-hearted and blue	0	1	2	3
14. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	0	1	2	3
15. I felt I was close to panic	0	1	2	3
16. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0	1	2	3
17. I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	0	1	2	3
18. I felt that I was rather touchy	0	1	2	3
19. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (eg, sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	0	1	2	3
20. I felt scared without any good reason	0	1	2	3
21. I felt that life was meaningless	0	1	2	3

**Depression Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Add 3, 5, 10, 13, 16, 17, 21 then multiply by 2)

**Anxiety Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Add 2, 4, 7, 9, 15, 19, 20 then multiply by 2)

**Stress Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Add 1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 18 then multiply by 2)

	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Normal	0-9	0-7	0-14
Mild	10-13	8-9	15-18
Moderate	14-20	10-14	19-25
Severe	21-27	15-19	26-33
Extremely Severe	28+	20+	37+