Musculoskeletal Disorders and Mental Health Disorders
**What is it?**

**Musculoskeletal Disorders** - The term musculoskeletal disorders covers any injury, damage or disorder of the joints or other tissues in the upper/lower limbs or the back.

**Mental Health Disorders** - It is estimated that two thirds of us in the UK will experience a mental health disorder, such as anxiety and/or depression, with 1 in 6 of us experiencing these symptoms in the last week alone. It is important for individuals, family and friends and work colleagues to be aware of the signs and symptoms to get help early and the right intervention.

**Signs and Symptoms**

Whilst everyone is different, common signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Low mood
- Feeling of a lack of interest or pleasure in activities
- Sleep disturbance
- Decreased or increased appetite and/or weight
- Impaired concentration
- General fatigue or loss of energy
- Agitation or slowing of movements
- Suicidal thoughts
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Physical symptoms are a common feature in anxiety, and people often do not relate these to any psychological issues but become more anxious about potentially serious underlying health conditions

Many of us will experience some of these symptoms in our day to day life and it will not be related to a Mental Health Disorder. For a diagnosis NICE suggests that you should be experiencing at least 5 of the symptoms and they should be present for at least 2 weeks, with each symptom should be present at sufficient severity for most of every day.

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**Musculoskeletal Disorders**

It has been shown to be significant overlap between the symptoms Musculoskeletal Disorders and Mental Health Disorders – *often leading to a feedback loop*. Where your injury leads to feelings of low mood, which in turn makes your pain and injury feel worse.

Work related Musculoskeletal Disorders have been shown to contribute to loss of work time, pain, disturbed sleep, reduced physical activity and increased levels of disability. All of these factors have also been shown to potentially contribute to poor Mental Health Outcomes.

**When a Musculoskeletal Disorder lasts longer than 12 weeks, it is considered ‘chronic’**. People who suffer from chronic pain symptoms often explain feelings of fatigue and being fed up with their symptoms and a sense that their pain is never going to get better, all of which can further contribute to low mood.

**Pain is a major symptom of any Musculoskeletal Disorders** - often leading people suffering from these avoid doing activities that they enjoy and preventing them from having a good night’s sleep. Which further exacerbates any fatigue and low mood.

In the opposite direction there is *substantial evidence that shows that people that experience Mental Health Disorders are at higher risk of suffering a Musculoskeletal Disorders*. Depression, anxiety, catastrophising, and low self-efficacy have all been shown to contribute to increased levels of pain and disability, compared to patients not expressing any disorders. With a study even showing that depression can actually be a predictor of knee pain.
Exercise and Mental Health

The benefits of exercise for general health are well known and regularly encouraged. The NHS recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate activity every week, such as a brisk walk or cycling.

Exercise has been shown to have a significant impact on Mental health disorders. Regular leisure-time exercise can help reduce the risk of experiencing symptoms and can improve symptoms of individuals already experiencing an Musculoskeletal Disorder.

It has been shown that individuals that engage in regular leisure-time activity of any intensity for at least 20 minutes every week, are less likely to have signs of depression or mental health disorders. There is a clear pattern however, that with a greater intensity and/or volume of regular leisure-time activity there is greater reduction in symptoms and risk of experiencing symptoms.

Tips

Early Intervention
Seeking assistance from a physiotherapist or other health professional can lead to an early diagnosis of an MSD. Ideally preventing chronicity and reducing the impact and Musculoskeletal can have on your mental health.

Exercise
Starting as small as 20 minutes a week of light walking can greatly reduce your risk of experiencing symptoms of a Mental Health Disorder. It is important to set realistic goals and measure your progress. A physiotherapist or qualified instructor can help you with this.

Sleep
The benefits of a good night’s sleep cannot be understated – while specific times vary, getting around 8 hours sleep has been shown to reduce risk of obesity, anxiety, depression, heart disease and significantly reduce levels of pain or discomfort in those suffering Musculoskeletal Disorders.

Lifestyle
It is important to maintain good general health – smoking and obesity contribute to higher risk of Musculoskeletal Disorders and Mental Health Disorders. Whether it is changes to diet, exercises levels or smoking cessation – every little bit helps.

Where can I get further information:

It is important that if you feel any of the afore mentioned signs and symptoms of mental health disorders that you seek assistance. This can include a responsible colleague at work, your GP, Nurse practitioner or physiotherapist.

A physiotherapist is trained to quickly diagnose and treat a large variety of Musculoskeletal Disorders, as well as being highly skilled in the prescription of exercise plans.

Your physiotherapist will be able to create a bespoke exercise program for you, whether it is to treat a specific Musculoskeletal Disorders, to improve Mental health or to reach a specific goal.
References

Mental Health Foundation. Mental Health Statistics: UK and Worldwide, 2016

NICE Care Guideline 90: Depression in adults: Recognition and management. 2009
https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg90

NICE Care Guideline 113. Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: Management. 2011
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