



GOVERNMENT
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OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
MINISTRY FOR HEALTH

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Superintendence
of Public Health

HOW DOES THE
WAY WE LIVE

DETERMINE
OUR HEALTH?



Introduction

Most of us are aware that physical activity, a balanced diet, not smoking and not taking up addictive substances are amongst the key factors contributing to better health and well-being. But what about our job, education, environment, and relationships? Can these affect our health, too? Research conducted across Europe by the WHO European Regional Office has shown that all these factors can make a significant difference to the quality of health that we enjoy.

For that reason, the Superintendence of Public Health within the Ministry for Health has prioritised this area through the *ESF Project – Establishing a National Platform to Address the Social Determinants of Health*. The aim of this project is to understand which of these factors are most likely to affect the health of Malta's population and the manner they can do so, and embark on an information campaign on what we can do to tackle these factors as individuals and as a nation.

Part of this campaign is the booklet you are holding, which is the second in a series of five. In this booklet, we focus on mental health and well-being and how, by taking care of ourselves, by talking about how we are feeling, by listening to each other, and by seeking professional help, we can make a huge difference to our way of life.

But, of course, this is not a one-size-fits-all since persons and their networks of loved ones are distinct and face unique economic, cultural, and societal realities. Nevertheless, change does not need to be overwhelming to be effective: small, yet decisive, steps towards being healthier and feeling more fulfilled are just as powerful. Moreover, the Government, through its many services, offers help along the way, fostering and encouraging positive change for all.



Childbirth & Mental Health

“**E**verything makes me angry these days; angry or sad,” Marthese tells psychologist, Dr Buttigieg. “I can’t shake it off. It’s little things, too.”

“How long has it been since you’ve given birth, Marthese?” Dr Buttigieg asks.

“And she’s lost her appetite too, Doctor. She’ll go a whole day on a cereal bar or an apple, and very little else,” interjects Marthese’s husband, Raymond.

Dr Buttigieg eyes the couple quietly for a while. She notices Raymond is blinking rapidly.



"Have you always blinked like this, Raymond?" she asks, gently.

"No, it's something I've noticed recently, too," Marthese replies.

"Raymond, Marthese, I'm really glad you came in today because a lot of people go through what you're experiencing. I believe you're both going through what we call postnatal depression and anxiety."

Raymond sniggers.



"Yes, Raymond, even men can go through antenatal depression (that's before the birth of a baby) and postnatal depression (after the birth of a baby). It happens because your mind is dealing with a number of changes all at once."

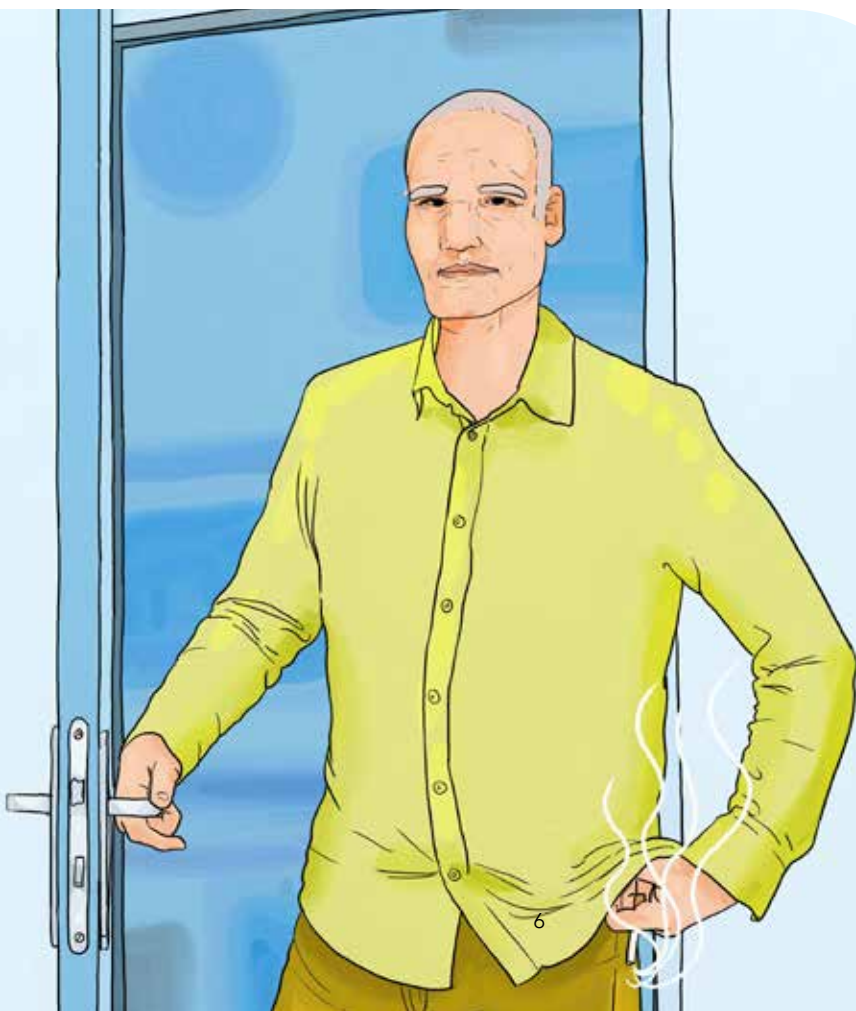
"So, that's why he's blinking this way?" Marthese asks.

"It can sometimes manifest itself that way. It can also make you feel sad or angry for no reason. Or make you not want to eat," Dr Buttigieg replies. "The good news, however, is that with some help, you will both feel better!"



Coping with Changing Circumstances

The next day, Raymond visits his parents. “How’s Jesmond been, Mum?” Raymond asks Ġuża. “He hasn’t been the same since he lost his job, Raymond. He’s smoking a lot again.”







"I always smoke a lot, Mum," Jesmond says as he enters the room.

"Jesmond, how are you?" Raymond says, jumping off his chair.

"Not great, Ray. I'm so ashamed. I went on a date yesterday and I burst out crying when he asked what I do for a living."

"Raymond, I understand why you feel this way, but I think you should contact our doctor, Dr Buttigieg. She may be able to help you work over some things while you look for another job."

"Maybe I should..."





Asking for Help

Later that evening, Ġuza calls Raymond to tell him he's forgotten his sunglasses at their house.

"How are the children, Raymond? I didn't even ask this afternoon. I'm so worried about Jesmond."

"Kylie is here. Do you want to speak with her?"

"Of course, I do!" she replies.

"Hi, Nanna! How are you? I'm okay overall, but I'm quite stressed out at school. I'm really happy I got into MCAST, but I'm worried I won't be able to keep up."



"Yes, it can be stressful, my love. Is there someone on campus that you can speak to? They may be able to help you out."

"Come to think of it, they do! The counselling service is available at MCAST and University. I learnt that during Freshers' Week."

"There you go," Nanna Ġuza replies. "There's nothing wrong with asking for help, Kylie! Remember that."





The electronic version in Maltese and English
may be accessed here:



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