

Getting it together

# Mental hypochondria serious but curable

You may be a mental hypochondriac and not even know it. This insidious malady has spread among adult Americans at a fantastic rate in the last two decades.

Yet, most of the victims of the problem are not aware that they are in its grip—partly because its effects are subtle, but mostly because it is so widespread that it appears to be the norm. So many of your friends have already got it that it seems like the natural way to be.

Most frequently it strikes young and middle-aged housewives, but it's not restricted to this group. Men, too, have displayed its tell-tale symptoms.

Among the hallmarks of mental hypochondria is a strong addiction to the Phil Donahue show and any other TV program that uncovers new, complex mental threats to yourself or your family.

By the millions, mental hypochondriacs rise from their sofas and cheer as Phil and his fellow video crusaders unmask such hidden mental monsters, as male menopause, post-partum depression, runaway teenagers, agoraphobia, and a thousand other fears and tangles with fancy Latin names.

IN BETWEEN psychological television programs, you can find these unknown victims buried in the latest

self-help book or woman's magazine. Or you may see them standing in front of the psychological section in the book store wringing their hands over the vast array of titles promising to warn them of some new emotional threat or to make them a better person.

You can only feel compassion when you hear the mental hypochondriac complain that there are more new psychological books than anyone could possibly read.

And they talk funny, too. You can spot one across the room at a party as you hear the language of pop psych seeping into the conversation. Key words, like gull, here-and-now, self-esteem, adapted child, and brown stamps, will tell you that you are listening to a full-fledged mental hypochondriac.

Looking for friends who also speak the pop psych language, mental hypochondriacs tend to cluster. They take self-help classes, join personal growth groups, seek psychological counseling, and form informal support groups in their neighborhoods. It isn't that they really have a serious psychological problem to solve. They just enjoy the opportunity to focus on personal feelings and discover compassion in their lives.

WHICH IS THE KEY TO under-

standing the mental hypochondriac. She is hungry for meaning. Nothing in her life seems really important. Nothing is worth getting upset about or being joyful.

She has gone through the excitement of building a nest, starting a family, helping to launch her husband's career. And now all is routine maintenance.

Everything seems comfortable. But something is missing. There is a vague empty feeling that haunts her, even on her good days. Yet, things are going so well in her life that she can't really complain.

Then drama. A magazine article or a TV show seems to be talking about her. She's had those very same fears for years. Her husband has been acting just like that author describes. Meaningfulness and purpose raise their flags. She has to find out more about this new emotional epidemic. She must protect her family.

Is that the sound of trumpets and drums in the distance?

ALL VERY exciting. And what could be the harm in a little pretend meaningfulness? Actually, more than you might think.

When we look at life's problems as complex, mystical syndromes with fancy names, we are overwhelmed by

By  
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Ph.D.



Brandon, you've got to have more faith in yourself. You've got to listen to that empty ache and understand it.

TO CURE ONESELF of mental hypochondria, it is necessary to restate faith in common sense. Instead of searching for a complex, mystical explanation for your feelings, one should look for simple understandings and practical solutions.

I know this is a little disappointing to psychological mystics who dream that human behavior is like a magical puzzle with complex, hidden meanings and subtle solutions. But the truth is that we are a lot less intricate than the wizards of pop psych would lead you to believe.

## Energy cost help available

April 30 is the deadline to apply for help in paying utility bills under the Energy Assistance Act.

In January the Michigan Legislature approved the bill, which expires Sept. 30, 1978, and appropriated \$38 million. Under the bill's provisions, there are two types of payments made to those who qualify.

For persons directly responsible for paying utility bills an initial payment of up to \$130 will be made, depending upon income. A second payment of up to \$70 will be made for those qualified.

The best solutions to personal problems like burn marriages and kids who won't listen are simple, direct and practical. Granted, these solutions may be more obvious to an objective outsider than to the individuals who are hurting, but they are understandable and do-able by the average person. It doesn't take a Ph.D. to be a successful husband or an effective mother. But it does take faith in oneself.

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based on actual gas, oil, and electrical energy usage for November, December and January. The total of the two payments cannot exceed \$200.

Those who receive payments under the recently completed Federal Energy Crisis Program will have those dollars used to credit future bills deducted from payments made under the new state Energy Assistance Program. The total for the combined payment from both programs cannot exceed \$200 for heat or \$160 for electricity.

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