



Orange County Migraine & Headache Center

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Domestic Violence

Definition: Intimate partner abuse; can be physical or sexual assault from a spouse, partner or former partner.

Prevalence in US: 1.5 million women/year; actual number probably much higher due to underreporting. Also, no reliable figures exist on incidence of verbal and emotional abuse. US Department of Justice's National Violence Against Women Survey showed a 26% of women and 8% of men to be victims by an intimate partner during the course of a lifetime.

Clinical Presentation: Will often present as depression; anxiety; chronic pain condition such as headaches; back pain; IBS; pelvic pain. Smoking and alcoholism can be red flags. Injuries or bruising that aren't consistent with the patient's explanation. Overbearing spouse that accompanies patient into exam room; some may even talk harshly to the victim in front of the healthcare provider.

How to ask about domestic violence: Screen for during annual check-ups; Are you under a lot of stress now? Are you currently in an intimate relationship? What is the relationship like? Does that person ever hurt you or does he/she make you feel bad about yourself? Do you-or did you ever-feel afraid of your partner? Have you ever separated/considered leaving your spouse?

Questions I ask if I suspect an unhappy marriage:

1. Are you happier when your spouse is home or not home?
2. Do you walk on eggshells around your spouse?
3. When you sit across the breakfast table from your spouse, do you ever ask yourself, "Is this who you want to spend the rest of your life with?"

What to do next:

1. Offer emotional support; give names/numbers of therapists.
2. Find out if in danger; give phone numbers/names of local shelters; determine support system of friends/family/church.
3. Give resource material; may be website; packet; handout. (See below)

Resources:

1. National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE (7233)
2. Family Violence Prevention fund 888-RX-ABUSE (792-2873)
3. AMA Violence Prevention Web page
www.ama.assn.org/ama/pub/category/3242.html
4. American College of OB/GYN Violence against women page www.acog.org
5. Hutchinson, S. I finally walked out. Medical Economics. August 2005; 66-67.

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Dedicated to the relief of pain caused by headaches and mood disorders

6. Laumbach, S. Domestic Violence: Your Doctor May Be able to Help. The Female Patient. August 2005; 5-6, 12.
7. Weiss G. Domestic Violence: Shattering the Silence. Medical Economics. August 2005; 62-66.

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