

MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC ISABEL HENRIQUES

NEWSLETTER

MAY 2021



WHAT'S NEW?

The increase in demand for our services in Portugal led us to expand the Mental Health Clinic IH to Coimbra, Portugal.

Right now the space is being renovated to offer the greatest comfort to our patients.

The opening will take place next June.



THIS MONTH'S EDITION

Our May newsletter starts with an introduction of our director and psychologist Isabel Henriques.

To celebrate Mother's Day, we bring a reflection on motherhood with its charms and illusions, we talk about the transition to motherhood, and the importance of the attachment between parents and children through life.

We continue with what is known so far about the long-term consequences of COVID-19, the importance of mindfulness for children, and we end with a reflection on our relationship with food together with our selection of recipes for Mother's Day.



MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC
ISABEL HENRIQUES



BUILDING DREAMS, RENOVATING LIVES

By Isabel Henriques

I am proud of my surname, Isabel HENRIQUES, passed on to me by my paternal grandfather, and much of what I am I owe him, António Henriques.

I am simple but delicate, magic is part of my life – he taught me that too.

Psychology is something that is part of me, it is ingrained in my heart, it is part of my reason.

Inspiration fits me well, allowing me to create magic with simplicity and with it, renovating lives and building dreams.

The imputations of inspiration take me on a unique journey full of delicacy and high spirits.

In this journey I have met fantastic people, and my learning experience has been varied. I value them all in the same way.

I confess that the emotions felt are diverse and dealing with them is not always easy but the most important thing is to not forget who I am and where I am going!

The joy I carry in my chest, the hope I carry in my persistence, always believe! – it is my motto of life that I have added it to my “Modus operandi”.

And so I have been pursuing my journey. I came to Amsterdam as if by magic, in this wonderful, romantic and, in the gray winter days, sad city. I have learned to give color to gray days, I have learned to see the beauty that there is in them, the warmth of the cosiness of home, the complicity with others and with me and to love my dear Portugal even more.

I have learned the true meaning of "family", of friendship, to feel the pain of absence, to feel the pain of others, to love the gift of life even more.

I embraced my art, being a psychologist, with fervor and determination always hoping to help in understanding for the reconstruction of a new vision. Believing that dreams can come true and life can start again whenever we want, that the magic is inside each one of us and it exists, if you just **ALWAYS BELIEVE!**

BECOMING A MOTHER: FROM ROMANTICISM TO REALITY

From the moment the result is positive "Yes, I am pregnant!", the adventure begins at a chilling acceleration and the movement of emotions reaches a speed at which we completely feel the loss of control. Well, it is like that, it is not worth worrying, it is part of the process and it is common to switch from laughter to crying with ease. Also, expect mood swings, from irritation to exaggerated sensitivity. This ambivalence is caused by the hormonal variation in the first quarter, but also by the uncertainties presented by the new situation.

It all seems like a dream, and now how will things be? The first doubts arise and we jump between emotion and reason. Emotion takes us to the dream, to the romanticism of being a mother, to the whole process that our culture teaches us and for which we have been educated: to find love and make that love bear fruit. The fruits of that love is what life represents, or rather the story of our life and it is from this act of love that we can remember that love will last forever.

Romanticism starts here, but it ends the moment you realize that being a mother is not seen like that by others, or even by the parents. We start a very unstable process, that differs for everyone.

The construction of castles in the void, adorned by beautiful pink curtains and bathed in the background by a beautiful clear blue sky, resplendent where the sun shines intensely and warms the hearts of those who inhabit this magical dream. The illusion grows and the construction becomes even greater, day by day, because in addition to the castle, it is placed a prince who carries his beautiful and sweet princess on his beautiful white horse.

The love of the two is consolidated with a beautiful, healthy and happy baby, cries little, eats very well, in this case he drinks the milk from the breast and the pope helps the breast in all parenting tasks. The servants clean the house, make the meals, keep the baby for the princes to stroll around, make programs for two, the in-laws live far away and so on! Anyone who reads this from the outside in thinks that I am giving a somewhat exaggerated perspective, but whoever reads this from the inside out knows what I am talking about! We know, for those who were once mothers, that

things are not castles, princes and princesses!

But in reality, becoming a mother is a whole other story. Being a mother means having to make choices every day, between the children's well-being and your own, in which most of the time we give up the choices that would make us much happier because we know that those same choices would not make our children so happy.

"Abdicate" is a very significant word for the psychic system of all of us, because it interferes with immediate pleasure, which is responsible for bringing us to emotional states of satisfaction, joy and well-being. And therefore, what we are going to feel is irritation because we are going against what really makes us happy.

So we have to work on raising awareness about: "I'm going to have a baby, what does that imply?" Having a baby is wonderful but we are not going to romanticize it because there is nothing romantic about it - and I am sorry for those who cannot see it yet this way.

I had a professor at the university who happens to be a writer, Eduardo Sá, who taught Child Psychopathology and always told us: "a baby always comes to pinch the couple's relationship!" Who knows how to interpret this knows what he was referring to because having a child is not all roses and affects the couple's relationship. There is no time for dedication to each other - the space for two ceases to exist to make room for new decisions in life, a very complex process!

We return to abdicate to the choices, to the emotions to which all this transports us and takes us to winding paths between being and not being a good mother. The reality of the awareness of the role of mother is a massive responsibility. For those who want to become a mother, try to talk to yourself to understand if that is what would make you feel happy or if you are prepared for a new life.

Wanting to be a mother is different from *being prepared* to be one. How do I know if I am prepared to take this step? I would say that the most important factor is discernment, which is fundamental for understanding and interpreting between romanticism and reality.

BEFORE BEING A MOTHER I WAS ALREADY A WOMAN

In the West before the 18th century, motherhood was seen very differently than it is today. At that time, as soon as children gained independence from basic care, usually at the age of 7, they entered adulthood: they worked, dressed, and were treated as such. With the lack of the concept of childhood that we have today, motherhood was limited to pregnancy and the aid of basic care in the first years of life.

With the advent of the Enlightenment, came the concept of motherhood as a universal feminine characteristic, making it seem like an instinctive and purely biological feeling. At the end of the 18th century, it began the construction of the maternal ideal with the exaltation of the mother's instinct and love. The mother begins to be compared with something pure, only with noble feelings of protection and chastity. The church's speech made it clear that breastfeeding and motherhood were duties and, therefore, a sin if not fulfilled. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when economic and political conditions force men to leave the house, the responsibility of the home and children is handed over to the mother who ends up also assuming the role of educator and thus, a social function. Gradually, this myth of maternal instinct became present in women from childhood on.

The result is the maternal concept that still exists in our society today. The idea that motherhood is something that all women must go through, and it is the happiest and most rewarding phase of our lives. That everything will fit "naturally": the desire and unconditional love for the child will be present from the beginning, breastfeeding will be easy, the so-called "maternal instincts" will magically kick in as soon as the baby is born, making mothers capable of handling as many tasks as necessary. The perpetuation of this image is so strong that even science has neglected the study of a woman's mental health when she becomes a mother. We know every detail of the development stages of the foetus, but very little about the transition to motherhood, what anthropologists call *matrescence*.

According to psychiatrist Daniel Stern, giving birth to a new identity can be just as demanding as giving birth to a baby. The puerperium is a delicate period, when the woman faces a physical, psychological and social fragility while the body recovers from childbirth and the hormones plummet, negatively affecting the mood. At the same time, there is a rearrangement of material and objective conditions to ensure the child's care.

The lack of social support from the father, family or work can make this process even more difficult. The reality shock can make mothers feel guilty and ashamed of not being happy, as if it were a sign that they were failing within the maternal ideal. Thoughts like "what have I done with my life?" are ignored and never revealed, as they would show defeat.

Due to the difficulty of dealing with all these factors, the mother can develop **baby blues**: mild and short symptoms of depression. This condition **affects 70% of women in the postpartum period**. When these symptoms become more serious (constant feeling of emptiness and hopelessness, loss of motivation and pleasure) and for a longer time, it can develop in the **postpartum depression disorder**, which **affects one in five women**. In this disorder, there may also be a lack of interest in the child or a feeling of incapability.

That is why it is important for society to start discussing motherhood in a realistic way, without the social construction that was imposed on us many years ago. It is necessary to normalize the immense and varied difficulties of this phase so that new mothers do not feel the guilt and shame that mothers have been feeling until now. This way, society can serve as a support factor for mothers instead of a demanding and judgemental factor.



ATTACHMENT: WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

In the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the importance of the first affective relationship and its impact on the social, emotional and cognitive development of children. The affective and continuous relationship with primary care providers (usually mother and father) promotes mental health and well-being throughout life.

The first years of life are crucial in the development of the human being. And it all starts with relationships.

The baby comes prepared to interact and learn right after birth. A few hours after birth, the baby already recognizes the mother's voice and soon after that the father's voice.

Since birth we have instinctive behaviors that aim to establish relationships with others. These behaviors are intended to maintain or achieve proximity to significant figures of affection, usually parents, with the aim of obtaining support, protection and security. These behaviors include crying, smiling, vocalizing, holding and looking, which stimulate caregivers' innate responses.

Attachment is our first affective relationship, which normally occurs

with the mother and father, and which will serve as a model for all future relationships. It is, therefore, a lasting psychological connection and it is from this attachment that the baby will establish the basis for a set of representations of the mother, the self and the world.

Early relationships with adult caregivers result in self-confidence, trust in others and self-regulation.

A safe child will build a model of a responsive, reliable caregiver and develop a view of themselves as deserving of attention and love. On the other hand, an insecure child sees the world as a dangerous place, where people must be looked at with caution and sees oneself as not worthy of attention and love. The quality of attachment has been consistently related to various aspects of the child's functioning, including sociability, self-esteem and cognitive skills.

Changes in the dynamics of the relationship, such as divorce (increased stress in the family) can affect the child's attachment, temporarily or permanently.

LIFE AFTER COVID-19: PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

There is still a lot to discover about the long-term consequences that COVID-19 will bring, both for those who directly suffered the infection, and for those who suffered the consequences of entrances and exits from confinements, social restrictions and professional instability.

If we can learn something from what happened in the past, we find that the impacts of a pandemic greatly weaken the psychological state of the population, as happened with SARS in 2003. At the time, there was an increase of 30% in suicides in people over the age of 65 years. The strategies needed to fight a pandemic, such as quarantine, restrictions on travel and social events, cause many negative psychological symptoms and, as a result of these restrictions, economic results are also associated with a decline in mental health.

Those who already dealt with psychiatric / psychological illnesses were the most emotionally vulnerable and became the most affected during this crisis.

The confinement measures represented a sudden interruption of normal life and forced a quick normalization and adaptation, in a process that involved a lot of fear and uncertainty. Thus, many people quickly began to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression caused by social isolation, lack of mental health habits and repeated exposure to negative news.

With the rise of the pandemic, many people have not been able to experience grief in the best possible way. The sudden death of family and

friends and **the impossibility of attending the last hours of life** or providing a dignified funeral, make it difficult to close the affective bond and make the emotional processing of death more difficult, which can stimulate feelings of guilt.

In addition, measures of social isolation caused **an abrupt decline in physical activity**, with the closing of gyms, public parks, schools and sports centers. However, physical activity is more than encouraged, as it has been proven to boost the immune system, prevent respiratory infections and, consequently, prevent new incidence of COVID-19. Excessive energy in a **situation of physical inactivity can increase metabolic disorders which, in turn, increase the risk of multiple chronic diseases.**

An April 2021, a study of 230,000 American patients surviving COVID-19 found that **1 in 3 were diagnosed with a neurological or psychiatric disorder after 6 months.** With this, the researchers conclude that there may be a wave of mental and neurological problems in the post-COVID world. The most common detected disorders were related to **anxiety and depression.** Stroke, dementia and other neurological disorders were more rare, but still significant (especially in people with severe symptoms of COVID-19).

These results alert us to the cross-sectional effects of this pandemic on the world population, which we are only now beginning to see appear, and confirms how much COVID-19 affects the brain and the mind to the same extent.



WHAT DOES FOOD REPRESENT IN OUR LIVES?

Have you ever wondered about the importance of food in your life?

For many people it is difficult to build and maintain a healthy relationship with food. They often feel almost impossible to find a balance between what they might consider “healthy eating” and the normal cravings that appeal to foods that are usually less interesting from a nutritional point of view.

Thinking about the different diets that are advertised and “sold” on the various sources of information that exist online, we are easily confused about what really makes us feel good (lettuce?), what we can only eat occasionally (oh my chocolate...), confused about food intolerances (I can't even drink milk anymore?), what is the real enemy to banish (is it sugar? Are they carbohydrates? But yesterday they said that after all what is bad is fats!?), if drinking water from the sea is good (what??) or if the best diet is paleolithic, ketogenic or egg diet...Regardless, these are the right recipes for a lack of motivation.

In the midst of so much information we easily get lost. However, one thing is certain for most people: food brings us comfort. It is common for a family to gather around the table on a daily basis or in the most special moments. The table is a welcoming space. Meal time promotes meeting, sharing, closer relationships, laughter, memories, and it is where you find out that your uncle Joe takes a whole hour to tell a story. Even though it is a source of great anxieties, conflicts and self-criticism, food has the power to comfort us, to remind us of other times, places and people, to transport us to other emotions.

Try to understand how you feel about different foods and find your own answers, asking yourself: “What does a good meal mean to me? How does a good meal look for me? Who's at the table with me? How do I feel at the table? ”



APPETIZER: ZUCCHINI SUSHI

Ingredients

- 3 small zucchini
- 60 grams of white cheese at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon chopped sun-dried tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon of olive oil
- 1 teaspoon chopped thyme
- 2 tablespoons of grated cheese
- Salt

Instructions

1. Cut the zucchinis into lengthwise slices.
2. Sprinkle with salt and grill in a nonstick skillet. Reserve.
3. Knead the cheese with a fork and season it with salt, sun-dried tomatoes, olive oil and thyme.
4. Spread a teaspoon full of the filling over a slice of the grilled zucchini.
5. Roll the zucchinis not too tight and place them on a baking tray lined with baking paper.
6. Sprinkle with some grated cheese and place them in a preheated oven (180°C) for 3 minutes.

OUR SELECTION FOR A DELICIOUS MOTHER'S DAY MEAL



SOFT POLENTA WITH BEEF RAGOUT

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons of olive oil
- 1kg diced beef
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 3 cloves of minced garlic
- ½ cup of red wine
- 2 sprigs of thyme
- 1 can of peeled tomatoes
- 4 cups of beef broth
- Black pepper
- 2 cups of whole milk
- 3 cups vegetable broth
- Salt
- 1 cup of corn flour
- 2 tablespoons of butter
- Parmesan cheese chips

Instructions

1. Heat a pan, sprinkle with oil and seal the meat cubes.
2. Add the chopped onion and garlic and sauté for 2 minutes.
3. Add the wine and the leaves of one sprig of thyme.
4. Add the tomato and the broth and cook on low heat for 2 hours or until the meat starts to crumble.
5. Add the salt and the pepper.
6. In a pan, mix the milk, the broth and the salt, when it boils, add the corn flour, little by little, always stirring.
7. Lower the heat and continue stirring for about 15 minutes until the flour cooks and the mixture is heavier.
8. Turn off the heat and add the butter.
9. Serve with the meat ragout and finish with the Parmesan cheese and the thyme sprig.



SOFT COCONUT DESERT

Ingredients

- 1 can of condensed milk
- 1 cup of water
- 1 cup of sugar
- 200g of grated coconut
- 1 glass of coconut milk (200ml)
- Cinnamon sticks for garnish
- Cloves for garnish

Instructions

1. Mix all the ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a low heat, stirring constantly, for 20 minutes or until thickened.
2. Place in individual bowls or in a bowl and let cool.
3. Decorate with cinnamon sticks and cloves.

Serve cold or in room temperature