

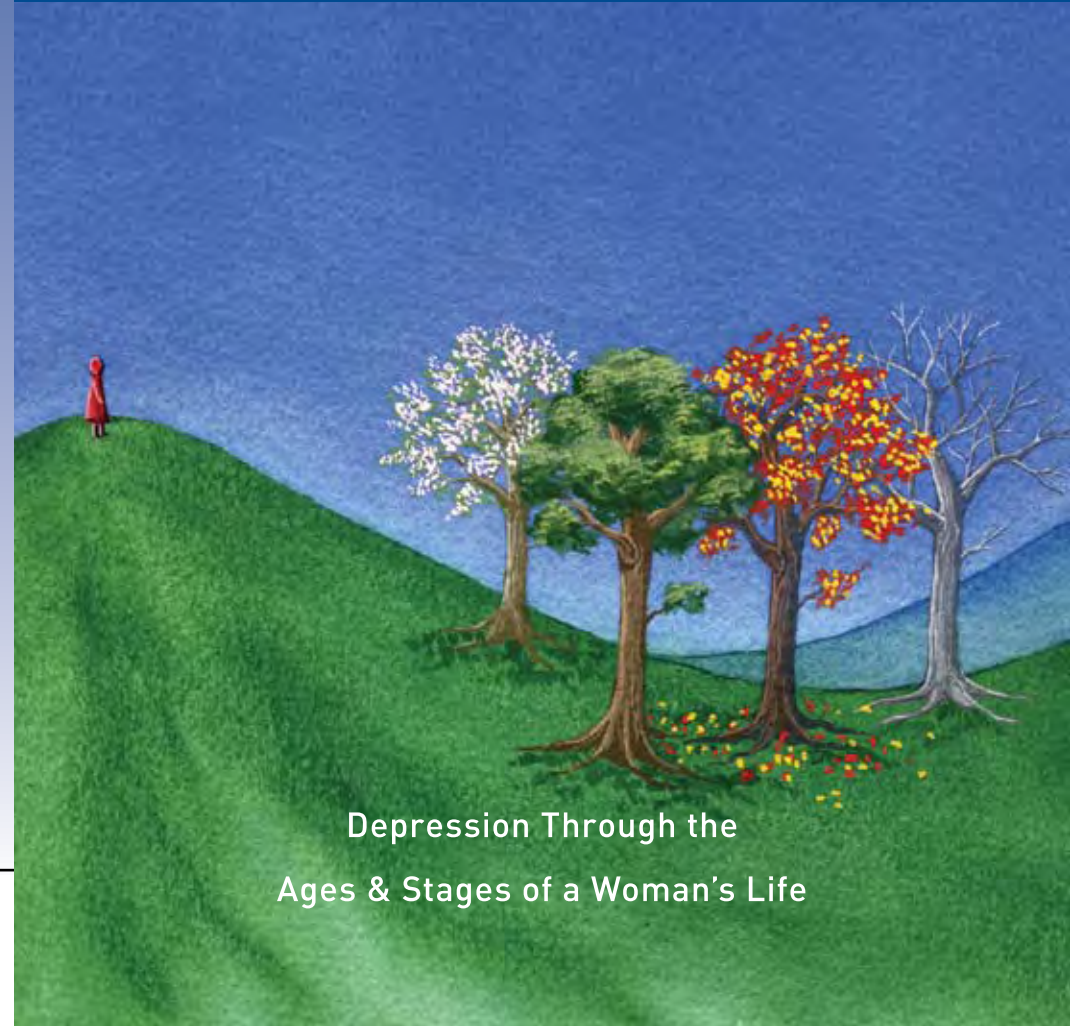


Depression and Women's Health



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Depression Through the
Ages & Stages of a Woman's Life



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INTRODUCTION

What is Depression?

Depression is a real illness and requires treatment. No one chooses to be depressed.

One thought is that it is caused by not having enough of certain chemicals in the brain. Depression can make people feel and act differently.



Everyone has a different experience with depression. It can start because of a single event or stress. It may also run in the family or it may have no outside cause at all. Also, when signs, or symptoms, don't all go away it is more likely to come back — but getting well is possible. Nobody should settle for feeling only a little better. Most people with the illness get better with the right care.

Talk to a doctor if both of the following occur:

- Sadness or loss of interest close to every day for at least two weeks
- At least four other signs from the list above during the same two weeks

Depression has many signs, or symptoms:

COMMON SYMPTOMS

Emotional

- Sadness throughout the day, nearly every day
- Loss of interest in, or enjoyment of, your favorite activities
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Excessive or inappropriate feelings of guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Trouble making decisions

Physical

- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Change in appetite or weight
- Trouble concentrating
- Restlessness
- Feeling slowed down

Fear of Being Judged

More people now know that depression is a real illness. But there is often still a stigma attached to depression. Depression has real causes. It can happen because of one event, or stress. It can also run in families. Sometimes, it may have no clear cause. No one chooses to be depressed.

You need not be ashamed of your depression or feel that it is your fault. Sharing your feelings may help you feel better.

Depression feels “as if there’s a weight, a shroud, a dark cloud that follows you around.”
—*Esther*

Women and Depression

Depression is more common in women than men. About two in 10 women have depression during their life. At the same time, about one in 10 men will get depression.



Also, women are more likely than men to feel hungry and sleep more, and to gain weight. Also, women try to take their life, or try suicide, more often than men. But more men than women complete the act of suicide.

Depression can happen at any time in a woman's life, even when she is a child. However, the risk increases when a girl reaches puberty. Puberty is the time when a teenage girl's body starts going through physical changes, like having her first period.

Depression Treatment is Available

If you have depression it is important to remember that there are several care options. One option is counseling with a therapist, also known as talk therapy. Another option is medicines from a doctor called antidepressants.

Risk factors for women

Things that may increase the risk of depression:

- Family history of mood disorders
- Personal history of depression as a young adult
- Death of a parent before 10 years old
- History of physical or sexual abuse as a child
- Retirement
- Problems with money
- Loss of a loved one
- Loss of support

The goal of treatment is to help people get back to feeling like they did before depression.

It is important to get medical help for your depression. Feelings of hopelessness and despair can lead people to think about suicide. If you find yourself thinking about this, it is important that you talk with your doctor immediately. If this isn't possible, go to the nearest emergency room or call 911. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-SUICIDE, where help is available day and night. **Never wait to get in touch with your doctor if you are worried.**



Getting help from a doctor is important. Having someone you can always count on, or a Support Partner, can also help.

Terms to know:

Psychiatrist: Cares for people with mental health problems. This doctor can give medicine.

Therapist: Helps people understand their feelings and actions. This person cannot give medicine.

Support Partners

Support Partners is a program for people with depression — and the people who care about them.

Support Partners offers three guidebooks that give tips to help people with depression and their loved ones build a group of friends that can give support. The program also offers useful tips for dealing with new depression experiences. Copies of the guidebooks can be found on the Web at www.SupportPartnersProgram.com.

A Support Partner is someone who is dedicated to helping you get well and can:

- Give you hope that you can get better
- Help you follow your progress
- See changes that may show your depression is coming back or getting worse

- Help with daily chores
- Help you find a doctor
- Go to doctor visits with you

A Support Partner can be important for women. Having supportive friendships can improve everyday life. Also, social relationships may guard women against depression more than men.



You might have just one Support Partner or you may have a few.

Among others, a Support Partner can be a:

- Spouse
- Life partner
- Boyfriend or girlfriend
- Family member (mother, father, sibling, aunt, uncle, etc.), in-law
- Close friend
- Teacher/coach
- PTA member
- Playgroup moms/dads
- Spiritual leader
- Religious or spiritual group
- Close colleague
- Current or old neighbor
- Roommate
- College or school friend

Your Support Partner may change as you age or as your feelings change. Remember, it can be important to have a Support Partner, but they cannot replace help from a doctor.

CHAPTER 1: Young Women & Depression

(Ages 20 – early 40s)

You can get depression at any age, but you are most likely to first get the illness in your teens through your early 40s.

Below are a few things that may lead to depression:

- Stressful life events — graduating from college, starting a career
- Loss of support system
- Money problems — credit card payments, debt, saving for retirement

Also, women are more likely than men to get depression after stressful life events.

Depression when Pregnant

About one in six women have depression when they are pregnant. When you're depressed, you often don't eat right, sleep well, or enjoy activities. Being depressed when you are pregnant can also result in your baby being born under-weight. And it can affect the health of you and your baby.



Your treatment can be more successful if you're well informed. Your doctor may start with talk therapy and may give medicine for serious cases. It is important to talk with your doctor about what's best for you.

Risk Factors During Pregnancy:

- History of depression or Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)
- younger age
- limited social support
- living alone
- greater number of children
- marital conflict
- ambivalence about pregnancy

Depression After having a Baby

Some women can get depressed after giving birth.

This type of depression is called postpartum depression.

This kind of depression may happen partly because of a quick change in hormone levels and new responsibilities.



Risk Factors After Having a Baby:

- History of depression or PMDD
- younger age
- limited social support
- living alone
- greater number of children
- marital conflict
- ambivalence about pregnancy

Talking to your doctor before the baby is born can help. And talk to your doctor about other ways to get help after you give birth.

You and your family need to know the signs of this kind of depression:

- Feeling depressed most of the day
- Losing weight and changes in hunger
- Can't fall asleep or sleeping all the time

- Slowing down of thinking and body movement
- Harder to concentrate and make decisions
- Little energy
- Feeling worthless or having a great deal of guilt for no reason
- Having thoughts of death or suicide

Care plans are different for each woman. They can include medicine and talk therapy.

If you are thinking about breastfeeding while taking medicine, you need to talk to your doctor.

Finding Support

There are several good choices for support during this time in your life. Think about asking for help from your:

- Husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend
- Family member
- Close friend
- Co-worker
- Roommate

Talking to other women who have had depression can also help. For example, if you are having trouble getting pregnant, another woman with the same experience may understand what you are going through.

“Can’t get out of bed most of the time. It feels terrible -- hopeless, joyless, exhausted, lost.”

—Sondra, 48

CHAPTER 2: The Menopause Transition

(Ages mid-40s – early 50s)

During the time just before you stop having your period, you begin going through many changes. This time is called perimenopause.

Some of the changes are physical, such as:

- Hot flashes
- Change in interest in sex
- Trouble sleeping

Other changes affect your mood. These changes may happen because the amount of a hormone called estrogen goes down.

You may feel symptoms that are similar to depression during this time. These feelings include a sad mood, lack of energy, and poor concentration. This does not always mean that you have depression. But, if these symptoms don't go away or get worse, you should talk to your doctor.

Other emotional issues may be related to depression at this time:

- When your children move out of the house
- Grief about never becoming pregnant
- Grief about loss of a pregnancy
- Caring for young children
- Aging parents
- Career problems
- Other stressful life events

Remember, it is important to talk about all of your symptoms with your doctor.





Your Care Choices and Treatment Team

Doctors may use estrogen therapy to help perimenopause symptoms and depression. But, this may not help your depression by itself. Some studies show that if you take an antidepressant along with estrogen pills, this combination can help treat depression during this time

of life. But estrogen treatment alone may not help with depression.

A combination of antidepressant medication and talk therapy might work better for some people. But it is important to talk with your doctor about what is best for you.

Finding Support

Support Partners at this time can be:

- A friend who is in the same place in life — consider scheduling a regular lunch with your friend or a morning walk. Both exercise and spending time together can help. Remember to talk to your doctor before starting exercise.
- A grown child — now may be the time to talk to your children as adults. Even if they're not living at home, you can still ask for their support. (But remember that your child should not be your therapist.) It also may be good for them to know their family history.
- Your husband — it can help to talk about how your feelings may be affecting your relationship.

“It felt like a world where nothing is enjoyable, where food doesn’t taste the same and the colors don’t look the same.”
—Terry, 39

CHAPTER 3: Older Women & Depression

(Ages 60+)

As you move into your 60s and beyond you may have new challenges. Your kids have most likely moved out. You may be looking at retirement or have retired. You may be starting to deal with the loss of loved ones. Your health may also be changing. Because of these things, you can get depression.

It may be hard for you to discuss your feelings of sadness or grief. Remember that if you have depression, you have a real illness and you need help from a doctor.

Depression and other Illnesses

Older women with depression can have other illnesses. Some of these can be heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. It may also happen with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease. Depression in later life often happens along with other medical illnesses. But really, it can be a differ-



ent problem that needs its own care. Depression is often not recognized or treated in older adults. Depression can make other illnesses worse. Treating your depression can help your overall health.

Grief or Depression?

While grief and depression may share some of the same symptoms, they are not the same. If your grief continues for a few months or affects your daily life, you may have depression. If this happens, you need to talk to your doctor.



Usually, you won't be diagnosed with depression unless symptoms continue for two months after a loss. Signs that you may have depression are:

- Guilt about things other than actions you did or did not take at the time of death
- Thoughts of death above and beyond feeling that you would be better off if you had died with your loved one

- Being obsessed with worthlessness
- Slowing of thinking and body movement
- Not functioning as well as you used to

Am I Depressed?

Depression in older adults can be hard to spot. If these describe how you are feeling, talk to your doctor as soon as possible.

- Sad or "empty"
- Guilty or worthless
- Very tired and slowed down
- Don't enjoy things the way I used to
- Restless
- Like life is not worth living

Other signs can include associated symptoms such as tearfulness, pain, or irritability.

Treating Depression in Later Life

Even though there are medicines for depression, in older adults' depression is often not given enough attention.

Older adults also may have trouble taking their

**“It feels
as if there’s
a weight,
a dark
cloud that
follows you
around.”
—Esther, 60**

medicine the way their doctor tells them to.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you are taking any other medicines. You should do this to make sure that you can take an antidepressant along with your other medicine(s).

Talk therapy can be an important part of your care plan. It may be helpful for people who are dealing with a lot of stress. Also, people who are having problems with personal relationships, or don't have support may be helped by talk therapy.

Sometimes using both talk therapy and an antidepressant works better than using one alone in some older people.

The Caregiver and Depression

If you're caring for a depressed relative, you are at risk for depression. It may be important to talk to your doctor or loved one's doctor about how you are feeling.



Finding Support in Later Years

Finding a Support Partner in your later years may be harder than when you were younger. But, it is still very important. Try a neighbor or close friend. Your grown children may also be a good choice if they live close by.

If you can't think of anyone, get in touch with the local area Agency on Aging. They can give a lot of support to older adults. They can also help you find support groups and help you meet people your age. Also, they can tell you ways that may help you feel less lonely.

If you live in a nursing home, talk to the home's counselor or event coordinator. They can also be good Support Partners.

Other options include:

- Your religious leader or others in your congregation
- An aide or housekeeper who is close to you
- Your partner
- People from the local senior center



CHAPTER 4: Care Options for Depression

This section offers care information to help you learn more about how to cope with depression.

Medicines

Neurotransmitters are chemicals in your brain. Depression may be caused when these are out of balance. Three of these chemicals — serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine — are thought to affect symptoms of depression. There are many different depression medicines that treat depression by balancing these chemicals.

A doctor needs monitor any patients taking medicines. A doctor will talk to you about the chances of side effects of any medicines. Any side effects should be shared with your doctor right away. A Support Partner alos can help track side effects as well, and help to share them with a doctor.



If you are given an antidepressant, it may take between three to four weeks to feel better. If you have questions about how your medicine works, ask your doctor. Sometimes your doctor might ask you to change to a different medicine. Your doctor might also give you a couple medicines together to help you.

As someone with depression, it is important that you



understand the relationship between the illness and suicide. Suicide is when someone takes their own life. Not all people with depression think about suicide. Also, not all suicidal thoughts lead to people taking their own life. If you ever think about ending your life, **you should seek medical help immediately.** If you can't reach your doctor, go to the nearest emergency room. You can call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-SUICIDE. Help is available day or night.

There may be times when your symptoms get worse. These may be times when you start to think about taking your own life. Contact your doctor immediately if you feel your depression symptoms are getting worse. Also, call right away if you begin to think of suicide. Contact your doctor immediately if you see any unusual changes in your behavior or if you have other concerns. **Never wait to get in touch with your doctor if you are worried.**

Talk Therapy

There are different kinds of talk therapy that can help a person with depression. Two common kinds are:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) —The therapist and patient work at making changes in negative thinking and behavior.

