

AGES & STAGES SURVEY FACT SHEET

Ages & Stages, co-sponsored by the National Women's Health Resource Center (NWHRC) and Eli Lilly and Company, is an initiative designed to help women recognize depression at any age, and encourage them to seek treatment and support. It is the newest component to the Support Partners program, a national educational program that encourages a support team approach to overcoming depression.

As part of the *Ages & Stages* program, a national survey of over 1,200 women with depression, as well as over 200 women who have supported someone with depression, was conducted in order to assess the ways in which women experience depression differently depending on their age. The survey found that while the impact of depression may change throughout a woman's life, most women have someone who plays a key role in supporting them in their recovery. However, the study also revealed that women rarely see this form of support as essential to managing their depression.

Following are highlights from the national *Ages & Stages* survey¹:

Understanding Depression

- **Despite the increasing understanding of depression, there is still a stigma and lack of understanding surrounding the illness that can prevent many women from getting the help they need:**
 - 50 percent of women with depression said they did not seek treatment at first because they thought they would "just get over it"
 - 29 percent of women say they did not seek treatment because of feelings of embarrassment
- **Women with depression face both emotional and physical symptoms that can interfere with daily life. Following were the most widely reported symptoms:**

| Emotional | Physical |
|---|---------------------------|
| Sadness (94%) | Feeling tired (94%) |
| Restlessness (92%) | Trouble sleeping (80%) |
| Loss of interest in things once enjoyed (89%) | Weight gain or loss (77%) |
| Trouble concentrating (89%) | Bodily aches (76%) |
| Feeling hopeless about the future (82%) | Headaches (76%) |

Seeking Support

Research shows that having supportive social relationships can improve the quality of life for those with depression, and may reduce the risk in women for developing major depression even more than men.ⁱⁱ For this reason, the Support Partners program encourages a support team approach, incorporating the help of friends and loved ones, along with help from a qualified healthcare professional, to manage the illness. A Support Partner can be anyone who is committed to helping a friend or loved one with depression.

Following are support-related findings from the survey:

- **Women of different ages have substantially different experiences with depression and very different networks of social support.**
 - Younger women often look to a parent, usually their mother, for social support.
 - Women in their 30s, 40s and 50s often look to their spouse and friends for support.
 - Women in their 60s are often left to contend with depression on their own; they typically have less knowledge of their family history of depression and they are the least likely to mention the role of friends and family in managing their depression.
- **The majority of women with depression have someone in their lives that plays a key role in supporting them in their recovery. However, despite research that suggests that supportive relationships are a key part of an overall treatment plan for depression, few see their Support Partner as a way to manage their illness.**
 - 72 percent of women have someone in their lives who plays a key role in supporting them and their recovery, however, only 35 percent of women with depression mention talking to friends and family as a way to manage their illness
- **Women tend to seek support from a variety of people, and these people may change as a woman ages.**
 - 48 percent of women with depression say their husband or partner has played the biggest role in supporting them and their recovery
 - 37 percent of younger women mention a parent as their key supporter, compared to 4 to 11 percent of older women
 - 20 percent of women in their 50s cite a friend as a key support partner, compared to 8 percent of women in their 20s and 30s
 - Only 18 percent of women in their 60s mention family and friends as a means to helping them manage their depression
- **Despite the fact that the majority of people living with depression experience physical symptoms, only 63 percent of women who supported**

someone with depression include bodily aches and pains in their definition of depression.

- **Women who support others through their depression recognize the value of support, however they are not always confident that they are giving the best advice or have the best information.**
 - 95 percent of supporters feel that support is very important to the recovery process for a person with depression
 - 48 percent of supporters say that discussing their friend or loved one's depression is difficult, mainly due to a fear of giving bad advice (56 percent), or a lack of knowledge about depression (39 percent)

ⁱ Results are based on a survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research from January 17 – January 26, 2006. The survey involved 1,222 women, ages 21-69 years, who have been diagnosed with depression. In addition, 217 women, ages 21-69 years, who helped support someone with depression were also interviewed.

ⁱⁱ Kendler KS, Myers J, Prescott CA. Sex differences in the relationship between social support and risk for major depression: a longitudinal study of opposite-sex twin pairs. *Am J Psychiatry*. Feb 2005;162(2):250-256.