

# Depression in Women

*Do you feel very tired, helpless and hopeless? Are you sad most of the time and take no pleasure in your family, friends or hobbies? Are you having trouble working, sleeping, eating and functioning? Have you felt this way for a long time? If so, you may have depression.*



About 1 in 8 women develop clinical depression during their lifetime.

\*National Institute of Mental Health, Unpublished Epidemiological Catchment Area Analyses, (1999).

## what causes depression?

Different factors can affect the risk of depression. Depression tends to run in families. One of the reasons for this has to do with genes. Some genes increase the risk of depression, while others increase resilience and protect against depression. Experiences like trauma or abuse during childhood and stress during adulthood can also raise the risk. However, the same stress or losses may trigger depression in one person and not another. Factors like a strong familial bond and healthy social connections can increase resilience.

Research has shown that in people with depression, there can be subtle changes in the brain systems involved in mood, energy and thinking, and how the brain responds to stress. The changes may differ from person to person, so that a treatment that works for one person may not work for another.

During childhood, girls and boys experience depression at equal rates. By the teen years, however, girls become more likely to experience depression than boys. Researchers continue to explore the reasons for this difference and how changes in hormone levels may be involved in depression risk during a woman's lifetime.



## what is depression?

Everyone feels low sometimes, but these feelings usually pass after a few days. When you have depression, the low feelings persist and they can be intense. Feeling this way can make you unable to do the things that make up daily life for weeks at a time. Depression is a serious illness that needs treatment. The types of depression that affect women are:



**Major Depression** – severe symptoms that interfere with your ability to work, sleep, study, eat and enjoy life. An episode can occur only once, but more often, someone could have several episodes in her lifetime.



**Persistent Depressive Disorder** – depressed mood that lasts for at least two years. A person diagnosed with persistent depressive disorder may have episodes of major depression along with periods of less severe symptoms, but symptoms must last for two years.



**Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder** – symptoms include severe mood swings, depressed mood and anxiety that appear consistently in the week before a woman's menstrual period and lift within a few days. Symptoms are severe enough to interfere with daily activities and relationships.

## signs and symptoms of depression

Feeling sad or "empty"

Feeling hopeless, irritable, anxious or guilty

Losing interest in favorite activities

Feeling very tired

Not being able to concentrate or remember details

Not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much

Overeating, or not wanting to eat at all

Thinking suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts

Having aches/pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems

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If you think you are experiencing depression, finding help is the first step to recovery. Take an anonymous mental health screening at [www.mhamd.org](http://www.mhamd.org).



## how can I help a loved one who is depressed?

If you know someone who is depressed, first help her see a doctor or mental health professional.

- Offer her support, understanding, patience and encouragement.
- Talk to her, and listen carefully.
- Never ignore comments about suicide, and report them to her therapist or doctor.
- Invite her out for walks, outings and other activities. If she says no, keep trying, but don't push her to take on too much too soon.
- Remind her that with time and treatment, she can get better.

## how can I help myself if I am depressed?

As you continue treatment, gradually you will start to feel better. Remember that if you are taking an antidepressant, it may take several weeks for it to start working. Try to do things that you used to enjoy before you had depression. Go easy on yourself.

Other things that may help are:

- Breaking up large tasks into small ones, and moving at your own pace. Try not to do too many things at once.
- Spending time with other people and talk to a friend or relative about your feelings.
- Postponing important decisions until you feel better. Discuss decisions with others who know you well.



## how is depression treated?

The first step to getting the right treatment is to visit a doctor or mental health professional. They can rule out other conditions that may have the same symptoms as depression, and can tell if medications you're taking may be affecting your mood.

- Medications** called antidepressants can help treat depression, but can take several weeks to work. They can have side effects including headache, nausea, difficulty sleeping or nervousness, agitation or restlessness, and sexual problems. Most side effects lessen over time. **Talk to your doctor about any side effects you may have.**

It's important to know that although antidepressants can be safe and effective for many people, these medications may present serious risks to some, especially children, teens and young adults. Anyone taking antidepressants should be monitored closely, especially when they first start taking them. For most people, though, the risks of untreated depression far outweigh those of antidepressant medications when they are used under a doctor's careful supervision.

- Therapy** can help treat depression. Therapy helps by teaching new ways of thinking and behaving, and changing habits that may be contributing to the depression. Therapy can also help women understand and work through difficult relationships that may be causing their depression or making it worse.

## where can I go for help?

Talk with someone you feel comfortable with, like your family doctor, religious leader or friend. They may give you suggestions or referrals for mental health treatment.

If you have private insurance, call the number on your insurance card specifically for mental health and substance use disorders. For information on public mental health services in your county, call your local Core Service Agency. Visit [www.mhamd.org](http://www.mhamd.org) for a listing of local core service agencies.

## If you are pregnant...

Before taking an antidepressant during pregnancy, talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits to you and your baby. Experts generally agree that each woman's individual situation should determine whether she can safely take an antidepressant while pregnant. MHAMD's Healthy New Moms Campaign has a medication chart and other resources that can give expectant mothers and providers more information about perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Visit [www.healthynewmoms.org](http://www.healthynewmoms.org) to learn more.

## Get help quickly

Call the Maryland Crisis Hotline at  
**1-800-422-0009**  
if you or someone you know is in crisis.

Information adapted from National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) NIH Publication No. TR 13-4779 (2013).