

Getting Help, Making a Difference

Depression is a leading cause of disease-related disability worldwide among women. Women with a history of PMS or depression are more likely to suffer recurrences during the postpartum and peri-menopausal times. Getting help can make a huge positive impact on women and their families across the lifespan.



Resources

Hope Line Network
Suicide and Crisis Hotline
1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline
1-800-422-0009

Healthy New Moms
1-800-PPD-MOMS (depression during
pregnancy or postpartum help-line)
www.healthynewmoms.org



Martin O'Malley, Governor

Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor

Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D., Secretary, DHMH

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Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
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410-767-6713
1-877-4MD-DHMH (463-3464)

Women and Depression

Across the Lifespan



Depression affects people of all ages, races,
and social backgrounds. And,
it affects twice as many women as men.

Women and Depression

Across the Lifespan

One out of very five women in the U.S. will suffer from depression at some time in her life. In women, depression is most common between puberty and menopause but also occurs earlier and later in life. Hormonal changes and stress (such as abuse, multiple roles at work and home, infertility, pregnancy losses, family and relationship issues) are risk factors for depression. Substance abuse is not uncommon among depressed women.

Under 20 Feelings of depression are more common during adolescence than during earlier childhood. Physical growth, hormonal changes, and the onset of menstruation force a girl to come to terms with a new body image.



In addition, greater psychological development involving a search for identity preoccupies the adolescent mind. Thoughts of suicide are often hidden from parents. Depression may be associated with substance abuse, smoking, poor school performance, self-cutting, unintended pregnancy and eating disorders.

Signs of Depression

At least five of the following for two weeks:

- Depressed or irritable mood
- Decreased pleasure or interest in activities
- Not feeling up to doing daily tasks
- Change in appetite or weight
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Feeling restless or slowed down
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Decreased concentration
- Sense of hopelessness
- Thoughts of suicide

Treatment

With accurate diagnosis and treatment, women with depression can be helped. Antidepressant medication and counseling are extremely effective treatments for depression.

20s to 50s *Changes in hormone levels with the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, postpartum period, and menopause make these years the most likely time for depression.*

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) – Women may feel sad, moody, anxious, irritable, teary, angry and listless for a few days to two weeks before their menstrual period. Physical signs such as bloating, food cravings, headache, muscle aches, breast soreness, and fatigue are also common. Symptoms taper off during the menses and disappear completely for the rest of the cycle. (Unlike PMS, chronic depression is present the entire cycle but may worsen premenstrually.)

Pregnancy and Postpartum - Mothers with prior episodes (or family history) of depression or PMS are more prone to become depressed while pregnant and afterwards. Lack of social support, family problems, or any recent stress can also place a woman at higher risk. Postpartum depression can adversely affect a baby's development because it interferes with the mother's ability to bond with her child.



Peri-menopause – Some women have no symptoms at all and some women suffer with hot flashes, night sweats, irregular menses, memory lapses, heart palpitations, weight gain, sadness, irritability, apathy, and moodiness. Sleep problems may make women more vulnerable to depression and fatigue. Women who have had PMS or depression in the past are much more likely to have perimenopausal depression.

50s and Beyond As women (and men) age, they are prone to illness, relationship loss, social isolation, and financial hardship. Many chronic disorders such as heart disease, osteoporosis, and stroke are associated with depression. Since women on average live five years longer than men, they are more likely to spend time in a nursing home and suffer a loss of independence with more years of disability. All these stresses may make women vulnerable to depression in later life.

