



FACT SHEET — *Women and Depression*

Facts on Women and Depression

- ◆ Women are twice as likely as men to suffer from clinical depression.
- ◆ More than 11 million American women are afflicted with clinical depression each year.
- ◆ Clinical depression is most prevalent in women during childbearing years but can occur at any age.

Symptoms of Depression

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says symptoms of depression include the following:

- ◆ Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood;
- ◆ Loss of interest or pleasure in your usual activities, including sex;
- ◆ Restlessness, irritability or excessive crying;
- ◆ Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, pessimism;
- ◆ Sleeping too much or too little, early morning awakening;
- ◆ Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down";
- ◆ Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts;
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions; and
- ◆ Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, or chronic pain.

Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression is a condition that can strike women who have had a child recently. It affects between 10 percent and 20 percent of new mothers, and it appears within two to eight weeks after birth. The condition may occur after any birth.

Postpartum Depression Risk Factors

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, women are more at risk for postpartum depression when they:

- ◆ have a history of moderate to severe premenstrual syndrome (PMS);
- ◆ suffer depression or anxiety during pregnancy;
- ◆ have a family history of depression, anxiety disorder or alcohol abuse;
- ◆ experience a stressful event, such as the illness or death of a loved one, moving or difficulties at work;
- ◆ lack emotional support, including lack of a supportive partner or conflict with your partner;
- ◆ suffer low self-esteem or have trouble managing stresses;
- ◆ have unrealistic ideas about motherhood;
- ◆ lack sleep;
- ◆ have an unwanted pregnancy;
- ◆ have a long, complicated pregnancy; or
- ◆ are having a newborn with physical or behavioral problems.



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Symptoms of Postpartum Depression

- ◆ Inability to sleep, or sleeping a lot, even when the baby is awake;
- ◆ Change in appetite;
- ◆ Extreme concern and worry about the baby or a lack of interest or feelings for the baby;
- ◆ Feeling unable to love the baby or your family;
- ◆ Anger toward the baby, your partner or other family members;
- ◆ Anxiety or panic attacks;
- ◆ Fear of harming your baby;
- ◆ Irritability;
- ◆ Sadness or excessive crying;
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating or remembering;
- ◆ Feelings of doubt, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness or restlessness;
- ◆ Lethargy or extreme fatigue;
- ◆ Loss of interest in hobbies or other usual activities;
- ◆ Mood swings;
- ◆ Feeling emotionally numb;
- ◆ Numbness or tingling in your arms or legs;
- ◆ Hyperventilating;
- ◆ Frequent calls to the pediatrician with an inability to be reassured; and
- ◆ Recurrent thoughts of death, which may include thinking about or even planning suicide.

Suicide and Women

- ◆ According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, a woman attempts suicide every 78 seconds, a rate twice as high as for men.
- ◆ A woman commits suicide every 90 minutes in the United States.
- ◆ Firearms are the leading method of suicide in women and men.
- ◆ The precipitating life events for women who attempt suicide tend to be interpersonal losses or crises in significant social or family relationships.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

SAD, or Winter Depression, is a condition caused by a deficiency of light during winter months. SAD affects females more than males. Symptoms of SAD include:

- ◆ increased appetite;
- ◆ binge eating of high carbohydrate foods;
- ◆ weight gain;
- ◆ inability to sleep, or need for sleep, and difficulty waking;

- ◆ immobilizing and/or suicidal ideas;
- ◆ decreased energy; and
- ◆ decreased creativity.

Treatment of Depression

Cynthia Davidson, D.O., an osteopathic physician practicing preventive medicine in Wells, Maine, recommends the following for women who may be suffering from depression:

- ◆ Learn to recognize symptoms and go to a doctor for help.
- ◆ If depression runs in your family, then you are at a higher risk for developing it.
- ◆ Find areas of your life that may be affecting you adversely and make changes.
- ◆ Be good to yourself. Treat yourself to quality time often.
- ◆ Find a good support system, whether it is a friend, a family member or a formal support group.
- ◆ People respond differently, and medication may not work right away. Discuss your progress with your doctor.

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) urges women to contact their osteopathic family physician for advice on preserving good health for an active lifestyle. Osteopathic physicians (D.O.s), physicians treating people, not just symptoms, are especially well qualified to assist in preventive healthcare since they are fully trained licensed physicians who have additional training that focuses on the body's structure and function, and its ability to heal itself. For more information visit the AOA's Web site at www.aoa-net.org.