

# Depression in Women

by Anne Brunette, MSW, Family Therapist

Clinical depression affects twice as many women than men all over the world. One out of eight women will have an episode of depression at some point in their lives. The specific causes of depression remain unclear. Possibilities include genetics, high stress levels, premenstrual and hormonal differences, and poverty. Others theorize that women may be more likely to admit to feelings of depression or seek professional help for symptoms. Regardless of the reason, it is important for women to know that they are not alone and that depression is treatable.

If you experience several of the following symptoms for more than two weeks, consider getting an assessment to determine if you do suffer from depression:

- Depressed mood more days than not
- Loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
- Sleeping more than usual or not being able to sleep
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Appetite change or significant weight loss or gain
- Persistent physical symptoms that cannot be explained medically

Treatment for women with depression is often very successful. The earlier treatment begins, the more effective it is. The most common forms of treatment are psychotherapy and medication. For severe depression, a combination of the two is often most effective. For mild or moderate depression, psychotherapy alone or in combination with medication helps many women either eliminate depressive symptoms or manage them effectively.

Psychotherapy can include cognitive behavioral therapy, which helps women change thoughts that contribute to depression such as pessimistic ideas, unrealistic expectations, or negative attitudes toward themselves. Interpersonal therapy can be especially helpful if struggles in relationships are a contributing factor in the depression. In any effective therapy, positive goals are developed and women begin to have hope for the future and take action that creates the momentum necessary for decreasing depression and living a happier life.

Medication can be very helpful for women with moderate to severe depression. Sometimes it allows the therapy to be more effective because women are more able to utilize the lessons and skills learned in therapy. Medications generally have some side effects for women but can help relieve symptoms quickly. Your medical doctor can recommend treatment depending on the severity of your symptoms.

***The most important fact for women to know is that depression is treatable.*** Research has shown that more than 80% of people with depression can be treated successfully with medication, psychotherapy or a combination of the two. As with most human problems, the sooner you ask for help, the sooner you will be on your way to feeling better.