

# Women and Depression



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Depression is more than being sad or going through a rough patch. It is a serious mental health condition that requires understanding and medical care. Some people have only one episode in a lifetime, but for most people depression happens multiple times and may last a few months to several years. Depression affects all people and is somewhat common, although women 18 to 45 years old are more likely to experience depression.

## What causes the higher rate of depression in women?

There are many reasons that women are at a higher risk of depression. Some of these reasons are:

- **Biological**, which can include pregnancy, the beginning of menopause and Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PDD), which is severe mood and behavior changes before periods.
- **Brain Structure**, gender differences in serotonin levels may have an impact on depression rates.
- **Family History**, some forms of depression run in families.
- **Psychosocial**, such as stress from balancing work-family responsibilities, discrimination, sexual and physical abuse, and poverty.

## Are there gender differences during a depression?

Women report experiencing more of the following symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Physical pain that does not respond to treatment
- Increases in weight and hunger
- Oversleeping
- Anger and hostility

## How does pregnancy influence depression?

Depression during or after pregnancy is common. A new mother may be depressed and not know it, they may think that they have the “baby blues”. But if the feelings of depression make it hard to get through each day, or take care of their baby, they may have depression. Any mother can experience postpartum depression and it does not mean that they are not a good mother. Post-partum depression can be treated.

## Are there gender differences in the response to *treatment* of depression?

In general, the following treatment options are as helpful for males and females for treating depression.

- **Therapy**, such as psychotherapy and bright light therapy for seasonal affective disorder (SAD).
- **Alternative treatments**, such as acupuncture and supplements. Individuals should always talk to their doctor before beginning any treatment.

Women experience more negative side effects than men when taking antidepressant medications. The menstrual cycle may change the body’s reactions to certain drugs.

## Is it safe to take antidepressants during pregnancy?

It is difficult to understand the risks of any drug given to pregnant women. During pregnancy, both the mother and baby are exposed to the drug. Medications that are safe for a woman are sometimes risky for a fetus. To see the FDA rating scale of risk for medications, look at the Physicians’ Desk Reference PDR or the [FDA Web](#)

[site](#) . This information is regularly updated. Talk with your doctor before taking any medications while pregnant or breastfeeding.

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