

Women and Depression

Depression is more common among women than men. Things such as hormones, biology, lifecycles and psychosocial factors unique to women may explain these differences. For example, women are especially vulnerable to developing Postnatal Depression due to hormonal and physical changes as well as having to adjust to their new roles as mothers when they give birth.

Although there are common symptoms and effects of Depression, it is important to note it also affects different people in different ways. Firstly, not everyone experiences every symptom. Some experience only a few and other many. The severity, frequency and duration also varies from person to person.

What is depression?

We all experience sadness from time, however if you experience 5 or more of the following for at least two consecutive weeks you may be experiencing clinical depression:

Depression symptoms

- Lowered or depressed mood – this can be being extremely tearful or sad.
- Social isolation – you don't feel like seeing family and friends and withdraw from people (e.g. refusing catch ups with people, stop returning phone calls, ceasing social media interactions, etc).
- Feeling restless.
- Loss of interest and motivation – you cease enjoying activities that once were enjoyable.
- Feelings of worthlessness – you feel you are not worthwhile or good enough.
- Feeling guilty – you blame yourself and see yourself as a burden.
- Sleep disturbances – either you sleep a lot (hypersomnia) or very little (insomnia).
- Changes in weight and appetite – you tend to over eat or very little.
- Reduced memory and ability to concentrate and focus – have difficulties remembering things and concentrating.
- Difficulties making decisions.
- Irritable- you become snappy and irritable easily.
- Energy reduction – you feel constantly exhausted regardless of getting enough sleep.
- Thoughts of death or suicide – you have thoughts of dying or feeling that life is not worth living (e.g. "it would be best if I wasn't here", "I wish could just go to sleep and never wake up", you make plans to harm yourself).
- Loss of libido – loss of interest to engage on sexual intimacy.

Women are more likely to feel sad and believe they are worthless as well as feeling excessively guilty.

Causes of Depression

There are various reasons why women experience depression. For some depression can be triggered by stressful life events such as a relationship break up, the death of a loved one, losing

a job, being in an abusive relationship or physical illness. For some the reason may not be as obvious as there may be factors such as:

- **Family history** – having a close family member (in particular mother) with a history of depression can be a contributing factor. It is important to know this is only a contributing factor, so this means you are at a higher risk of developing depression as compared to the general population. It does not mean you will develop depression.
- **Personality traits** – women who tend to excessive worry or dwell on negative events, see themselves in a negative light and are critical of themselves are more likely to develop depression.
- **Childhood experiences** – women who have experienced neglect or abuse as children including bullying are more likely to develop depression as adults.
- **Brain biology and chemistry** – changes in levels of chemicals such as serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine play a role in developing depression.

Treatments for Depression

At Vida Psychology we ensure to use only evidence based psychological interventions. Following are some examples:

- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** It is an approach that can bring long lasting relief after short term treatment. It focuses on women's views and interpretations of themselves and the world and how these impact on their moods and behaviour. The objective is to identify these interpretations, challenge and replace them with more helpful interpretations. One important element of CBT is to engage on behavioural tasks that challenge those interpretations. This allows women the opportunity to see firsthand the inaccuracy of their views. This in turn facilitating change.
- **Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT):** It focuses on identifying and addressing interpersonal relationships and the expectations of others that may contribute to the woman's depression. The objective is to help women develop assertive communication, increase adaptability, increase supports and develop new ways to resolve conflict and nurture relationships.
- **Short term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP):** It focuses on increasing the woman's awareness of their own thoughts, feelings and motivations. The objective is to identify barriers that may get in the way of having healthy relationships, effective communication and daily functioning.

How to get help

Your Family Doctor/ General Practitioner is a great first point of call. He/ she has established relationships with Psychologists and Psychiatrists highly trained in treating depression. If they believe you would benefit from seeing one, they will make a referral through a Mental Health Treatment Plan and will recommend the right person for you.

At Vida Psychology we take pride in fostering relationships with GPs. Our female Psychologists have extensive experience in treating women with depression.

“Your Shared Care Practice: *Working together to support patients and their GPs*”

1/508 Queensberry Street
North Melbourne, Victoria 3051
Phone 03 9328 8200
Fax 03 9328 8711
Email Carmen@vidapsychology.com.au
www.vidapsychology.com.au
ABN 80 161 627 384