

YOUR CARE POLMED

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Why depression affects more women than men



Depression can affect anyone at any age. However, it appears that women are more at risk.

It's estimated that women are twice as likely to suffer from depression than men. In fact, up to 70% of people who have sought help for depression are women.

Causes of depression in women

While depression has various causes, some are specific to women:

Societal factors:

In South Africa, a woman is murdered every 3 hours. The high prevalence of gender-based violence and crime in South Africa, coupled with relationship conflict, poor economic opportunities, low social status, low income, and juggling many responsibilities between family and work life can increase a woman's risk for depression.



Antepartum depression:

This is a form of depression experienced during pregnancy. In South Africa, this affects between 21 and 39% of pregnant women. Risk factors include a history of depression, unwanted pregnancy, infertility, the fear of having a miscarriage, and lack of support.



Postpartum depression:

Postpartum depression affects up to 30% of South African mothers after giving birth. Risk factors include a history of depression, breastfeeding problems, poor social support, infant complications, and hormonal changes.



Perimenopausal depression:

Perimenopause refers to the period before menopause. Fluctuating hormones and a history of depression can increase a woman's risk for perimenopausal depression.



Symptoms of depression

If you, or a woman you know, have been exhibiting some of the below symptoms for at least six months, then they may be suffering from depression:

- Feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, despair, and sadness
- Irritability
- Severe fatigue
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Trouble concentrating
- Suicidal thoughts
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in appetite
- Low moods



Depression management

"Depression may not be visible to others, and we may also not be inclined to admit that we are depressed ourselves, but it's important to seek help to get better," explains clinical psychologist Lwanele Khasu. "The effects can be dire when not treated."

There are various ways to manage depression, and the first step is to acknowledge you have a problem.

Your doctor:

If you suspect you have depression, it's essential to reach out to your doctor first. They will rule out any other medical conditions and ask you about your concerns for your mental health. If they believe you have depression, they will refer you to a mental health specialist.

Registered counsellor:

A registered counsellor will talk with you about your concerns and encourage you to address problems positively by helping you clarify issues, explore options, develop strategies and increase self-awareness.

Clinical psychologist:

A clinical psychologist will use psychotherapy to help you manage your condition. This can include helping you figure out how to manage negative thoughts and behaviour best.

Psychiatrist:

Psychiatrists are medical doctors that not only diagnose and treat the medical condition but, if necessary, they can prescribe medication for depression. A clinical psychologist and counsellor may refer you to a psychiatrist if they believe your treatment needs medication. They, along with your doctor, also monitor the physical effects of depression.

It's essential to reach out to your doctor if you are struggling with your mental health. As the coordinator of care, they will introduce you to systems that will help you manage your depression – not all of these require medication.

Read the checklist below and tick the questions you'd like to discuss with your doctor during your visit. You can ask these questions to help ensure you get all the guidance you need:

Questions to ask your doctor

1. I think I may be at risk for depression/anxiety/post-traumatic stress disorder/alcohol misuse. Would you be able to confirm this?
2. What is depression/anxiety/post-traumatic stress disorder/alcohol misuse?
3. What are my treatment options?
4. What are the risks and side effects of this treatment?
5. What happens if I don't do anything about this diagnosis?
6. I want to check up on my general health regularly. When do I need my next general check-up?

Once your diagnosis is confirmed, and treatment is prescribed, refer to your member guide, scheme website or contact the Polmed Client Service Call Centre on 0860 765 633 and follow the prompts to the Mental Health Programme. Alternatively, send an email to Polpsych@medscheme.co.za.

You may find that managing your mental health is simpler than you think.

References

- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression/art-20047725>
- http://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=111:depression-and-women&catid=61&Itemid=143
- <https://www.womenshealth.gov/menstrual-cycle/premenstrual-syndrome/premenstrual-dysphoric-disorder-pmdd>
- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12884-019-2355-y>
- <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/publications/depression-in-women/index.shtml>
- https://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/genderwomen/en/
- <https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.women.html#signs-amp-symptoms>
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/which-doctor-is-best-for-treating-depression-1065269>
- <https://healthtimes.com.au/hub/psychology/9/guidance/healthinsights/counsellor-or-psychologist/2116/>
- <https://www.everydayhealth.com/depression/treatment/how-find-right-therapist-depression/>
- <https://www.apa.org/topics/overcoming-depression>
- https://www.saps.gov.za/services/long_version_presentation_april_to_march_2017_2018.pdf

If you have any questions or need more information, please call POLMED on 0860 765 633 (select the option for the Disease Management Programme), or send an email to polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za with your membership number and contact details.