



## Types of Depression Unique to Women

By Robin Weiss

A woman's unique biology may predispose her to unique forms of depression not found in men. In addition to the major types of depression that affect men and women, women suffer from unique types of depression due to their special physiology and hormones. Estrogen, the "female sex hormone," affects more than 300 functions in a woman's body including regulating menstrual cycles, protecting the heart and maintaining strong bones. The fluctuating levels of estrogen during menstrual cycles, pregnancy and menopause may impact mood and, in severe cases, trigger depressive episodes.

Unfortunately, these types of depressive episodes in women and girls often are blamed on "being moody," "that time of the month," or "the change" and go untreated. It is time to get beyond stereotypes that prevent women from getting medical help:

- ❖ Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) can be treated or prevented. There is no reason why women need to suffer so needlessly and frequently.
- ❖ More than half of the women suffering from postpartum depression will experience it again with the birth of another child. It is critical to identify this danger and treat it early.
- ❖ Rates of suicide for women are highest during the perimenopausal years. These are tragically shortened lives, considering women now live a third of their lives after menopause.
- ❖ Recent research shows that women's biology differs from men's in many more ways than previously thought. These physical differences (such as different levels of estrogen, serotonin, cortisol and melatonin) are providing clues to why women are much more susceptible to depression as well as a special type of depression called Seasonal Affective Disorder.
- ❖ Stress plays a major role in depression, and it appears that women and men respond to stress differently. Women are more likely to suffer from "emotional ailments" such as depression, anxiety attacks and eating disorders. Men are more likely to act out aggressively and abuse drugs and alcohol.

- ❖ Women's fluctuating hormone levels during menstrual cycles, after childbirth, and during menopause contribute to forms of depression unique to women. These include Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD), Postpartum Depression, and Perimenopausal Depression. Current research is helping us to understand the biological factors for depression in women and identify ways to treat and prevent it. A woman may suffer from depression at any point during her life. Like depression in men, the underlying cause of depression in women is a combination of changes in brain chemistry, stress, trauma and genetics.

The major types of treatment for depression are the same for women and men. Women who have suffered sexual traumas (such as rape and incest) may want to work with a therapist who has training and expertise in this area.

Reference: Everydayhealth.com 9/2007