



Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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The male face of depression

Women are diagnosed with depression at twice the rate as men.¹ However, men may show different symptoms than women do, which may make it more difficult to diagnose. A recent study found that men report higher rates of anger or aggressive acts, substance abuse and risk taking than women. When researchers factored in these “male-type depression symptoms,” they found that about one in four men met the criteria for depression. Slightly fewer women — about one in five — had depression.²

Lisa Martin, PhD, who led the study, says it’s not that all men have symptoms such as angry outbursts or risk taking. But when these factors are included, more cases of depression are identified.³ The stigma of

depression can contribute to men not seeking help. They may see self-doubt as a sign of weakness.⁴

Yet in recent years, depression in men has taken on a more public face. Jon Hamm plays the womanizing, scotch-swilling Don Draper on TV’s *Mad Men*. Hamm has chronic depression, which has been successfully treated with therapy and medication.⁵ Actor Owen Wilson is known for his easy-going, fun-loving role in *Wedding Crashers*. In 2007, many were shocked to learn he tried to kill himself. He was later treated for depression.⁶ Others are not so lucky. Olympic silver medalist Jeret “Speedy” Peterson spoke openly about his lifelong struggle with mental illness. Then, just 17 months after the freestyle skier won the silver, he killed himself.⁷

Depression can be deadly, especially for men. According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, men are four times more likely to die from suicide. However, women attempt suicide three times more often than men. This may be because men choose more lethal methods.⁸ Male or female, it’s important to get treatment. Of those diagnosed

with major depression, treatment is effective for 80–90 percent.⁹

Much more than the blues

People with depression describe it as something much more overwhelming than typical feelings of sadness. They say it’s like living in a black hole. They may feel empty or like they don’t care about anything.¹⁰ Biological, social and psychological factors may contribute to depression. Risk factors include:¹¹

- Loneliness
- Recent stressful life experiences
- Family history of depression
- Relationship problems
- Money worries
- Trauma or abuse as a child
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Unemployment or underemployment
- Health problems or chronic pain

Getting help

Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if you’re feeling depressed. When you visit, be prepared to talk about your symptoms, including:¹³

- The kind of symptoms you’re having
- When you started having them
- How long they’ve lasted
- How bad they are
- Whether you’ve had symptoms like this in the past (and if so, how they were treated)

Tell your doctor about any medicines you’re taking. Also, talk about whether there is a history of depression in your family.

Call 911 for emergency services. If someone is talking about suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

Get connected to a trained counselor at a crisis center in your area, any time 24/7.

1-800-273-TALK

1-800-273-8255

1-800-SUICIDE

1-800-784-2433

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Some symptoms of depression are common for both men and women:

- Feeling persistently sad or irritable
- A change in sleeping or eating habits
- Change in energy level, feeling less energy or becoming restless or agitated
- Having a hard time thinking or remembering
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive problems and chronic pain¹²

Women tend to have stronger social networks and talk about their feelings with friends. A man may not have built up this resource. This makes it more difficult for a man to manage depression.

The “manly” side of depression

Men don’t always recognize when they’re depressed. They may view the condition as unmanly, a sign of weakness. While a woman who is depressed tends to blame herself for her feelings, a man may blame others. A woman may avoid conflict, while a man who is depressed may actually try to create conflict. He may turn to alcohol or drugs in an attempt to self-medicate.¹⁴

Substance abuse only makes the condition worse. And depression can lead to substance abuse. By the time a person seeks treatment, he or she may have what’s called a dual diagnosis of depression and substance abuse.¹⁵

Finding the strength to seek treatment

Contrary to what some men believe, seeking help for depression takes strength and courage. No one treatment works for everyone. But most people respond to a combination that may include therapy, medication, lifestyle changes and social support.¹⁶

Therapy. Two main types of therapy that have been shown to be effective in treating mild to moderate depression: cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT).¹⁷ CBT helps you change negative ways of thinking and behaving. IPT helps you work through relationship issues that may affect their condition.¹⁸

Antidepressant medications. These drugs affect brain chemicals that are involved in regulating mood. There are many different types of antidepressants. If you’re considering medication, work with a mental health professional who can monitor your treatment.¹⁹

Lifestyle changes. Regular exercise has been shown to be a natural way to ward off depression. Be sure and talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise plan. Also make sure you’re eating well and getting enough sleep. Look for ways to reduce stress.²⁰

Social support. Staying connected to others is important.²¹ But for a man who’s depressed, reaching out can be difficult. Consider joining a support group. Join a club or take a class. Seek out a friend you haven’t talked to in awhile. Building relationships takes time, but it will help you feel less alone.

Resources

www.liveandworkwell.com

Visit liveandworkwell.com to find news, information and videos about depression. Get help finding a mental health professional with the “Find a Clinician” tool.

Ask your health benefits representative for your access code to liveandworkwell.com.

The information, advice, treatments and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for informational and educational purposes only. Consult with your doctor or mental health provider for specific health care needs, treatment or medications. Certain treatments may not be covered under your benefit, so check with your health plan regarding your coverage of services. We do not recommend or endorse any treatment, medication, suggested approach, specific or otherwise, nor any organization, entity, or resource material that may be named herein. We make no representation or warranty of any third party website, including but not limited to, that they are free of computer viruses or the accuracy of their content. Except for liveandworkwell.com no other site identified herein is affiliated or controlled by us. You will be subject to the terms of use, privacy terms and policies of any site you may visit.

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