

## Women`s Mental and Emotional Health Facts Everyone Should Know

Women`s mental and emotional health is a complex subject. From our life experiences to the role that hormones play, many women struggle to understand our thoughts and emotions and are seeking ways to experience greater emotional and mental health:

- Female brains are born ready to connect with others. Research shows differences between the male and female brain from a very young age. As we mature, females tend to think more relationally than males, looking at things through the eyes of how it will affect everyone else, and emphasizing relationships.
- Hormones directly impact the brain. When hormones, like estrogen, shift, so do the neurotransmitters of the brain that make us feel normal and well. Each shift in hormones directly shifts a woman s brain chemistry, which has a direct impact on her emotions, moods, and overall mental health.
- Our life experiences can alter our brain chemistry too. What happens to us in life has a physiological affect on our brains. Over time, trauma, loss, and significant life stressors can alter the brain so much that we think and feel differently too. A women s mental and emotional health is really a function of life experiences + hormones + the brain.
- Eventually, our brains can change so much that we experience an Emotional Meltdown . Emotional struggles, mood swings and mental health issues are often a result of too much stress on the brain.



Certain times of life make women more vulnerable to mental and emotional health issues. The onset of menses and teen years, pregnancy, postpartum, and peri-menopause are just a few of the most vulnerable times a in a woman s life because of the extreme shifts in hormones that occur during these times.

## Understanding depression and anxiety in women

Are you experiencing signs of depression? Depression is not "one size fits all," particularly with regard to gender. Not only are women more prone to depression than men, but the causes of female depression and even the pattern of symptoms are often different. Many factors contribute to the unique picture of depression in women from reproductive hormones to social pressures to the female response to stress. Learning about these factors can help you minimize your risk of depression and treat it more effectively.



Depression can be a serious condition that can impact every area of your life. It can affect your social life, relationships, career, and sense of self-worth and purpose. For women in particular, depression is becoming increasingly more common. In fact, according to the National Mental Health Association, about one in every eight women will develop depression at some point during her lifetime. If you re feeling sad, guilty, tired, and just generally down in the dumps, you may be suffering from depression. But the good news is that depression is treatable, and the more you understand about depression s particular impact on women, the more equipped you will be to tackle the condition.

## Signs and symptoms of depression in women may include:

- Depressed or "sad" mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness and worthlessness
- Suicidal thoughts or recurrent thoughts of death
- Sleep disturbance (sleeping more or sleeping less)
- Appetite and weight changes
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of energy and fatigue



From the time a girl reaches puberty until about the age of 50, she is twice as likely to have an anxiety disorder as a man. Anxiety disorders also occur earlier in women than in men. Women are also more likely to have multiple psychiatric disorders during their lifetime than men. The most common to co-occur with anxiety is depression.

Differences in brain chemistry may account for at least part of these differences. The brain system involved in the fight-or-flight response is activated more readily in women and stays activated longer than men, partly as a result of the action of estrogen and progesterone. Women are more than twice as likely as men to feel anxiety, especially during the hormonal ups and downs of PMS, perimenopause, and menopause. Anxiety is often the first sign of perimenopause. While most of us will experience episodes in which we feel some or all of these symptoms, what differentiates healthy anxiety and/or panic from chronic anxiety and panic attacks is the trigger.





Women who have low self-esteem, suffer from anxiety, depression, trauma, or who tend to be overly critical of themselves, are at a tremendous disadvantage in the workplace, in school, in social settings, and even in their personal relationships. At Medicine Horse Center of Montana, we specialize in working with women from adolescence through adulthood. We recognize that many times our clients' mental and emotional health issues started at very young ages. If we can deal with some of the issues at early ages, it will help to make better decisions both professionally and personally later on in life.

We can help you if you are challenged by one or more of the following women's issues such as relationship or family problems, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, career changes, divorce, or finding your purpose in life.

#### **Counseling can help a woman:**

- bring more joy into your life
- heal old hurts and wounds
- manage mild anxiety or depression
- learn new ways of self care using the mind, body, and spirit connection
- examine unrealistic expectations and create more realistic goals for life
- examine negative or unhelpful thinking patterns and habits, and establish new thought patterns to set you up for success!

*NATALIE NORRELL* with MEDICINE HORSE CENTER OF MONTANA