

ASK THE DOCTOR



Help For Women Suffering From Depression

by Lee Cohen, M.D.

(NAPSA)—An expert offers helpful answers to health questions:

Dear Dr. Cohen:

I've noticed some changes in my wife the past few months and I'd like to help her as much as I can. We've been married ten years and have three children—ages seven, five and one year. My wife is 37 years old. Lately she just doesn't seem herself. She used to be so vibrant and full of life but recently she has been sleeping all the time—she's lost some weight and seems generally sad. She has missed work quite a few days the past three months, has stopped attending her yoga classes and rarely takes our kids out to the park on the weekends like she used to. It would be wonderful if there were something we could do to help her regain her old enthusiasm. My children and I miss her, and our youngest child really needs her. Any ideas?

Signed, A Hopeful Husband
Dear Hopeful Husband:

Feeling “blue” or “down in the dumps” once in a while is normal. But there is a difference between occasional feelings of discouragement and having depression. According to the National Mental Health Association, women are

twice as likely as men to experience depression. Although the reasons for the differences in depression between men and women are not entirely clear, research suggests depression has multiple causes—some biologic, possibly hormonal, and some social. These factors may contribute to what is seen ultimately in clinical situations: women with PMS, postpartum blues and depression during menopause.

Although depression affects up to one in four women at some point in their lives, clinical depression is not a “normal” part of being a woman. Since your wife has experienced depressive symptoms for some time now and her daily life is affected, you should make an appointment for her to see a doctor or qualified mental health professional right away. Fortunately, 80 percent of all cases of clinical depression can be effectively treated with medication, psychotherapy or a combination of both.

If your wife begins a medical treatment, pay close attention to changes in her daily routine. As a loved one, you are in the best position to judge when she is back to her old self and enjoying her life again. Is she taking the children to the park, accepting invitations and keeping a regular schedule at work? Clinically, when symptoms are absent for at least six months, she has reached remission. This is

the goal of treatment because remission is the first step toward a complete recovery.

There are several classes of antidepressants available today including the older tricyclics; MAO inhibitors; SSRIs, which increase the brain chemical serotonin; and the newest category, SNRIs. SNRIs are dual-action medications that increase both the levels of serotonin and norepinephrine, another brain chemical associated with depression. Depression sufferers do have better results with certain medications than others, so you and your wife should be sure to talk with her doctor about all of these treatment options to find one that will work best. If your wife improves but does not seem to be fully her old self on one medication, do not be afraid to talk to your doctor about trying a different antidepressant.

Remember that depression is a debilitating disease and should therefore be treated the same way you would treat any other serious illness—by speaking to your doctor and getting the proper care and treatment. For more information on depression, call a local mental health center or visit www.womensmentalhealth.org and www.GoOnAndLive.com.

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Dr. Cohen