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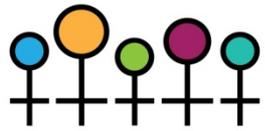
# Women, Mental Health, and HIV

*Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.*

#onewomanatatime

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

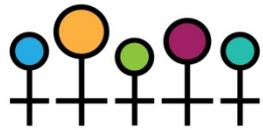
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# What is Mental Health?

- Refers to emotional, psychological, social well-being
- Affects the way people think, feel, act
- Helps determine how people handle stress, relate to others, make choices
- Good mental health is a sense of well-being, confidence, self-esteem
- Mental health problems can change how well people function at work/home



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# Mental Health and HIV

- For people living with HIV (PLWH), mental health problems can affect physical health; they can
  - Make it harder to take HIV medications on time
  - Make it harder to keep appointments/take advantage of support network
  - Interfere with healthy behaviors
  - Impair ability to cope with the stresses of daily life
- PLWH at higher risk to develop mood, anxiety, cognitive disorders
  - Conditions are treatable
  - ***People who experience mental health problems can get better and many recover completely!!***



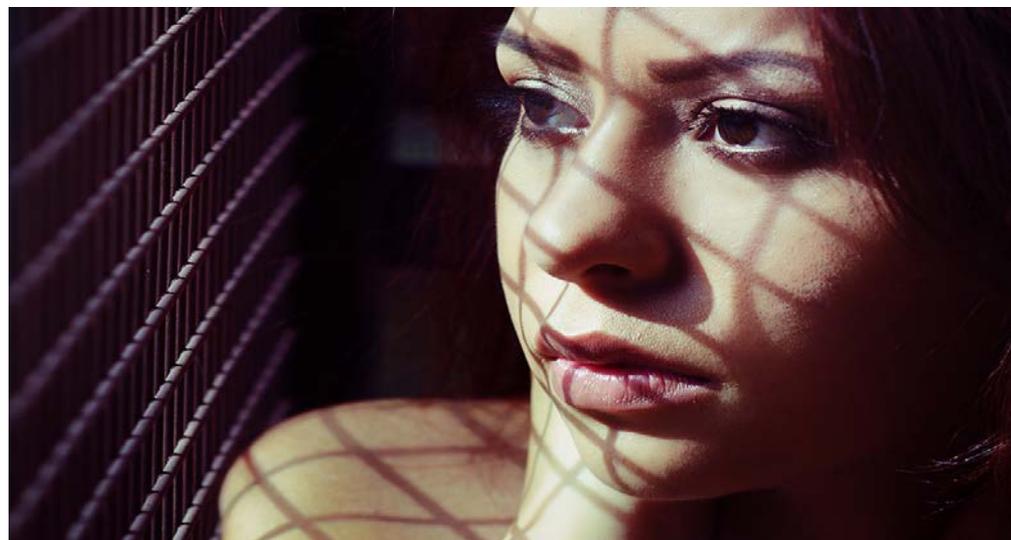
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# What Is Depression?

## ***Being depressed:***

When someone feels down, sad, blue, unhappy, hopeless

These are all ***normal feelings; almost everyone*** experiences them sometimes



If these feelings become overpowering, disabling, or long-lasting, they may be a sign of **depression**



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# What Is Depression?

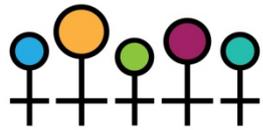
- **Compared to sadness, depression is:**
  - More intense
  - Lasts longer (more than 2 weeks)
  - Interferes with your day-to-day ability to function
  - A diagnosis based on having certain # of specific symptoms
  - Not a normal part of living with HIV
  - Can cause some serious health problems
- Consult health care provider if:
  - Showing symptoms of depression (next slide)
  - Unsure if feelings you are experiencing are normal



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# Some Symptoms of Depression

- Changes in appetite or weight, and/or sleeping patterns
- Aches or pains for no clear reason
- Episodes of crying for no clear reason
- Feeling sadness, guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness
- Irritability; getting into arguments easily
- Lack of pleasure in activities that usually interest you
- Low sex drive
- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Thoughts of harming oneself or committing suicide



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# Some Symptoms of Depression

- Not taking care of yourself in terms of grooming, dressing, and personal hygiene
- Skipping or not going to work, calling in sick
- Being very critical and down on yourself
- Not talking to or going out with friends
- Not joining your usual social activities or hobbies
- Crying or feeling like crying more often than normal
  - Often without knowing why
- Using more alcohol or other recreational drugs
  - ***Sometimes substance use hides depression*** (self-medicating)



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# Women and Depression

Women are ***2x as likely to be depressed than men*** – possibly due to:

- Burden many women bear as primary caregiver
- Having less household income, education, social support
- Strong link between depression and violence against women (physical, sexual, or emotional)



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# Depression in Women Living with HIV

Women living with HIV (WLHIV) ***even more likely to suffer from depression***

- Getting an HIV diagnosis is life-changing; can be difficult to hear and accept; some may feel:
  - Overwhelmed, helpless, unable to cope with an HIV diagnosis
  - Afraid for future health, disclosing HIV status to friends, family
- The stigma that many women living with HIV experience may lead to social isolation and loneliness
- All these feelings are key elements of depression



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# Depression in WLHIV

- Many women living with HIV experience other ***large life stressors*** that can lead to depression:
  - Racial discrimination
  - Poverty
  - Violence
  - Single parenthood



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# Depression and Older WLHIV

As ***HIV treatments have improved***, more and more older women are living with HIV

- Growing older often involves its own life challenges that can lead to feelings of sadness or depression:
  - Chronic disease
  - Disability
  - Loss of loved ones
- One study showed that ***more than 6 in 10 WLHIV ages 50 - 76 years old*** suffered from depression



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# Depression Can Cause Serious Problems

Studies show direct connection between depression and poorer health for those living with HIV

WLHIV who are depressed:

- Seek HIV care less often
- Have more trouble sticking with their HIV drug regimens
- Have more rapid disease progression
- May miss drug doses, take wrong dose, or dose at wrong time
- Not taking HIV drugs regularly can lead to the development of resistance, leading CD4 count to drop and/or viral load to go up



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# Getting Help Can Make a Big Difference

- One study showed risk of death cut in half for those women who contacted a mental health provider
- Important that depression be ***diagnosed and treated as quickly as possible*** to avoid serious problems



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# Treatment Options

The good news is that ***depression is treatable***

- While it is true that depression can get better on its own, this can take months or even years
- Treatment will likely shorten the time it takes to feel better and may help with adherence to HIV drugs
- Treating depression can keep you from losing a job, a relationship, or even your life



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# Psychotherapy

- Various mental health professionals can provide *psychotherapy*
- Talking to a trained professional about what you are experiencing
- Therapist provides support, helps you understand what is troubling you
- Most psychotherapy occurs one-on-one; group therapy can also be helpful for some
- In U.S., mental health professionals who provide psychotherapy include psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors



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# Antidepressant Medications

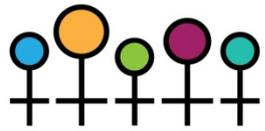
- Often prescribed for depression or anxiety
- Many antidepressant and anti-anxiety drugs can interact with some HIV drugs
  - Talk to your provider before starting any new medications
  - Generally safest type of antidepressants for use with HIV drugs is **selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs)**:
    - Celexa (citalopram), Lexapro (escitalopram), Luvox (fluvoxamine), Prozac (fluoxetine), Paxil (paroxetine), and Zoloft (sertraline)
  - DO NOT take St. John's Wort (popular herbal antidepressant)
    - Affects immune system; interacts with many HIV drugs



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# Get Checked and Treated for Depression

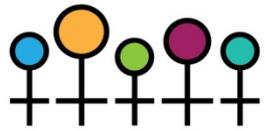
- If experiencing symptoms of depression:
  - Talk to provider
  - Ask for referral to see a mental health professional
  - Can improve your health, quality of life, including adherence
- While some don't believe in mental health care, problems or injuries require treatment, whether they are physical or mental
  - When we experience emotional difficulty, ***there is no need to suffer when effective treatment is available***



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# Stress Management

- Everyone deals with a certain amount of stress
- For WLHIV, stress can become overwhelming
  - High stress can damage your immune system, cause physical/emotional illnesses
  - Research shows stress can speed up progression of HIV



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# Physical Signs of Stress

- Allergies
- Change in appetite
- Back pain
- High blood pressure
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Clammy hands
- More colds than normal
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Racing heartbeat
- Muscle tension
- Nightmares
- Rashes
- Restlessness
- Sleeping problems
- Stomach aches



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# Emotional and Behavioral Signs of Stress

## Emotional

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Denial of a problem
- Difficulty making decisions
- Loneliness
- Nervousness
- Feeling powerless
- Feeling rejected
- Feeling trapped
- Feeling unhappy for no reason
- Being easily upset
- Worrying frequently

## Behavioral

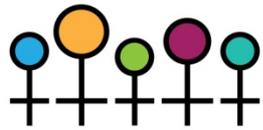
- Increasing alcohol, tobacco, drug use
- Not tending to physical appearance
- Arguing with friends or family
- Avoiding tasks and responsibilities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Crying easily
- Being late to work
- Eating too much or not enough
- Snapping at people
- Watching more TV
- Withdrawing from family/friends



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# Decreasing Stress

- While you may not be able to remove your stressors, remember that you are human and understand you need help
- Make a list of:
  - Areas in which you feel overwhelmed and need help
  - Who or what can help
  - How to get available services



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# Finding Help

## ***Free or low cost services that can help with stress include:***

- Medical services
- Counseling/ psychological help
- Child care
- Taxi rides
- Bus passes
- Acupuncture
- Yoga classes
- Community college classes
- Massage
- Support groups
- Dating services for people living with HIV
- Free computers
- Legal services
- Drug and alcohol programs



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# Social Support

- For all areas of mental health, it may also be helpful to ***seek support of other WLHIV***
  - Support groups
  - Peer counseling
  - The Well Project's online blog for women living with HIV, *A Girl Like Me*
- Social support from friends and family has been found to help people with HIV avoid depression, cope better
  - Friends and family can also provide emotional support



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# Other Treatment

- Meditation, massage, yoga, breathing, relaxation exercises can help with mental health, depression, stress
- Acupuncture and acupressure therapies may help reduce stress, improve mood
- Mindfulness techniques may help you get back in touch with what makes life worth living
  - Some have been combined with traditional psychotherapy, shown very effective (e.g., mindfulness-based cognitive therapy)
- Good nutrition and physical activity are beneficial, no matter which treatments are chosen



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## Learn More!

- To learn more, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
  - [Depression, Women, and HIV](#)
  - [Stress Management](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  - [www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  - [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](https://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.twitter.com/thewellproject](https://www.twitter.com/thewellproject)