

Depression: the link between Menopause and Christmas  
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What do Menopause and Christmas have in common? Unfortunately, they can both be associated with a higher risk of depression.

The holidays are thought to be a time of peace and joy. However, planning a perfect get-together, scheduling social events, shopping for gifts, baking up a storm and fighting crowds can understandably leave some people sad and stressed.

Similarly, many women at midlife feel the happiest and most fulfilled they ever have. Unfortunately, when women are specifically going through the menopause transition, they are two to four times more likely to suffer from depression. In fact, a woman is prone to mood changes at any time of hormonal change, such as during puberty, just before periods and around the time of pregnancy. The menopausal transition is an example of another one of those vulnerable times.

Symptoms of depression include sadness, being more irritable, tearfulness, loss of interest, inability to experience pleasure, increased guilt and a subjective feeling of being slowed down. To complicate matters, both depression and menopause can also share similar symptoms, such as low energy, poor memory and concentration, weight gain, insomnia, fatigue, muscle tension/pain and decreased libido.

Unfortunately, depression at menopause is more likely if a woman has had prior depression (especially premenstrual syndrome or postpartum depression), if she has significant life stress, if she has more severe menopause symptoms like hot flashes, if she has poor social support, if she smokes or if she is physically inactive.

It is really important for a woman to get evaluated and treated by a physician if she is worried about depression. Not only can depression lead to difficulty in relationships and problems functioning at work. Depression is also associated with a higher risk of heart disease and dementia.

Treatments a woman can initiate by herself include:

1. Exercising daily, including yoga.
2. Eating a healthy diet. Choose plant based, low fat foods. Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake.
3. Practicing stress-reduction techniques, which include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation exercises, meditation and mindfulness. Consider visiting [www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org) or [www.korumindfulness.org](http://www.korumindfulness.org) to get started.
4. Making time for sufficient self-care and enjoyable self-nurturing activities, like massage, reading or listening to music.
5. Seeking out counselling. Many people benefit from talking with a professional therapist to better understand themselves and others, as well as to improve their communication and coping skills.

Some people also benefit from medication to help ease their suffering.

It is exceedingly important for people to seek medical attention if they are having any thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

In conclusion, Christmas and midlife may be times for celebration, but we need to recognize that not everyone is “merry” and that’s ok. Help is out there for those who need it.