

# CONTACT QUALITY QUEST

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Visit our website: [www.contactbhs.com](http://www.contactbhs.com)  
Comments: 480/730-3023

## What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depressions can range from transient "blues" following child birth to severe, incapacitating, psychotic depressions. Studies suggest that women who experience depression after childbirth very often have had prior depressive episodes. However, for most women, postpartum depressions are transient, with no adverse consequences.

### What are the symptoms of depression?

Symptoms of Depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, including sex
- Restlessness, irritability, or excessive crying
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, pessimism
- Sleeping too much or too little, early-morning awakening
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down"
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

### What is the treatment for postpartum depression?

The most commonly used treatments for depression are antidepressant medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of the two. Which of these is the right treatment for an individual case

depends on the nature and severity of the depression and, to some extent, on individual preference. In mild or moderate depression, one or both of these treatments may be useful, while in severe or incapacitating depression, medication is generally recommended as a first step in the treatment. In combined treatment, medication can relieve physical symptoms quickly, while psychotherapy allows the opportunity to learn more effective ways of handling problems.

### For More Information...

You can find out more about postpartum depression by contacting the following organizations:

National Institute of Mental Health, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>  
NIMH Public Inquiries  
6001 Executive Boulevard, Rm. 8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663 U.S.A.  
Voice (301) 443-4513; Fax (301) 443-4279  
TTY (301) 443-8431

Depression After Delivery, Inc.  
<http://www.depressionafterdelivery.com/>  
Depression After Delivery, Inc.  
91 East Somerset Street  
Raritan, NJ 08869

This information was abstracted from a fact sheet developed by the National Institute of Mental Health.

## BEING YOUR BEST

**A Mental Health Overview** Each one of us is unique. Every person sees and relates to the world differently and for this reason, what is mentally healthy includes a wide range of possibilities. Generally speaking, however, people who are able to be successful in their own lives tend to share the following traits.

**Self-Esteem** Do you value yourself? While all of us enjoy being praised on occasion, people with a good sense of self-esteem know their own value and don't always rely on others to tell them they're worthwhile.

**Life's Challenges** Are you able to "roll with the punches"? Successful people are able to handle challenges at each stage of life, even though they might be temporarily put off by them.

**Flexibility** Are you flexible or do you always have to be right? Successful people are able to make mistakes, accept them as mistakes and not moral failings, and admit them readily.

**Realistic Expectations** Do you expect too much of yourself? Of others? While successful people can and do set goals, they are realistic about what they can accomplish and aren't afraid to redefine their goals when it's clear

the expectation is too great.

**Acknowledge Feelings** Are you aware of your feelings? Do you allow yourself to experience them without judging them as good or bad? We all have feelings that may sometimes seem irrational, but successful people are able to acknowledge them and move on instead of denying their existence.

**Accept Responsibility** Can you accept responsibility for what you do or the choices you make? While it's human nature to make excuses once in a while, successful people are able to accept responsibility for themselves and their actions. At the same time, they refrain from denying responsibility or blaming others.

**Ask for Help** Can you ask for help? Sometimes it's hard for us to admit that we can't solve a problem ourselves, but successful people ask for and get help if they need it. That's how they struggle and learn to be successful.

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# DEPRESSION CAN BREAK YOUR HEART

**R**esearch over the past two decades has shown that depression and heart disease are common companions and, what is worse, each can lead to the other. It appears now that depression is an important risk factor for heart disease along with high blood cholesterol and high blood pressure. A study conducted in Baltimore, MD found that of 1,551 people who were free of heart disease, those who had a history of depression were 4 times more likely than those who did not to suffer a heart attack in the next 14 years. In addition, researchers in Montreal, Canada found that heart patients who were depressed were 4 times as likely to die in the next 6 months as those who were not depressed. Depression may make it harder to take the medications needed and to carry out the treatment for heart disease. Depression also may result in chronically elevated levels of stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, and the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (part of the "fight or flight" response), which can have deleterious effects on the heart.

The first studies of heart disease and depression found that people with heart disease were more likely to suffer from depression than otherwise healthy people. While about 1 in 20 American adults experience major depression in a given year, the number goes to about 1 in 3 for people who have survived a heart attack. Furthermore, other researchers have found that most heart patients with depression do not receive appropriate treatment. Cardiologists and primary care physicians tend to miss the diagnosis of depression; and even when they do recognize it, they often do not treat it adequately. The public health impact of depression and heart disease, both separately and together, is enormous. Depression is the estimated leading cause of disability worldwide, and heart disease is by far the leading cause of death in the United States. Approximately 1 in 3 Americans will die of some form of heart disease.

Studies indicate that depression can appear after heart disease and/or heart disease surgery. In one investigation, nearly half of the patients studied one week after cardiopulmonary bypass surgery experienced serious cognitive problems, which may contribute to clinical depression in some individuals.

There are also multiple studies indicating that heart disease can follow depression. Psychological distress may cause rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, and faster blood clotting. It can also lead to elevated insulin and cholesterol levels. These risk factors, with obesity, form a constellation of symptoms and often serve as a predictor of and a response to heart disease. People with depression may feel slowed down and still have high levels of stress hormones.

 This can increase the work of the heart. As high levels of stress hormones are signaling a "fight or flight" reaction, the body's metabolism is diverted

away from the type of tissue repair needed in heart disease. Regardless of cause, the combination of depression and heart disease is associated with increased sickness and death, making effective treatment of depression imperative. Pharmacological and cognitive-behavioral therapy treatments for depression are relatively well developed and play an important role in reducing the adverse impact of depression. With the advent of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors to treat depression, more medically ill patients can be treated without the complicating cardiovascular side effects of the previous drugs available. Ongoing research is investigating whether these treatments also reduce the associated risk of a second heart attack. Furthermore, preventive interventions based on cognitive-behavior theories of depression also merit attention as approaches for avoiding adverse outcomes associated with both disorders. These interventions may help promote adherence and behavior change that may increase the impact of available pharmacological and behavioral approaches to both diseases.

Exercise is another potential pathway to reducing both depression and risk of heart disease. A recent study found that participation in an exercise training program was comparable to treatment with an antidepressant medication (a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) for improving depressive symptoms in older adults diagnosed with major depression. Exercise, of course, is a major protective factor against heart disease as well.

The NIMH and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute are invested in uncovering the complicated relationship between depression and heart disease. They support research on the basic mechanisms and processes linking co-occurring mental and medical disorders to identify potent, modifiable risk factors and protective processes amenable to medical and behavioral interventions that will reduce the adverse outcomes associated with both types of disorders. For more information please contact:

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)  
Office of Communications and Public Liaison  
Public Inquiries: (301) 443-4513  
Media Inquiries: (301) 443-4536  
E-mail: [nimhinfo@nih.gov](mailto:nimhinfo@nih.gov)  
Web site: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)  
Information Center  
Phone: (301) 592-8573  
E-mail: [NHLBIinfo@rover.nhlbi.nih.gov](mailto:NHLBIinfo@rover.nhlbi.nih.gov)  
Web site: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

# Young at Heart ~ Enjoying Your Golden Years

**P**erhaps you've looked forward to your retirement years with mixed feelings. But as they now approach, there are things you can do to replace some of your doubt or dread with fact and positive action. An average retiree can plan to live 14 to 16 years past retirement. Many live 20 or more years. You'll want to live those years with all the health and happiness you can. How can you keep your golden years glistening?

**Secrets of a Long Life** Research finds the following common characteristics among long lifers: They eat a healthy diet, are physically active, know how to work hard but prudently, manage their stress positively, follow their body's intuition, don't abuse alcohol or drugs, are optimistic, spiritually alive, socially and intellectually active and tend to live orderly lives. They also tend not to be worriers, have a strong sense of purpose in life and enjoy laughter. They don't consider themselves old and used up.

## **Building Your Golden Years**

Use your time now to build a healthier

and happier life. Your diet is healthiest if it's low in fat, salt and sugar, and higher in fiber, low-fat dairy products, fruits, vegetables and complex carbohydrates. Walking is the safest and easiest form of exercise. If the weather is bad, walk in a mall, health club or your home. Your interest in a healthy, active lifestyle can help spur your social life. Building a full and rewarding social life with family and friends is one of retirement's great opportunities. When you worked, you couldn't easily meet old friends for coffee and stay out late at a dance. Now you can take the time to have fun. You can also take time to develop your skills and talents. Perhaps you'll focus on completing some goals for which you had no time until now. Try to paint, learn to play the piano or write a journal. You will enjoy the challenge and achievement, and you may develop a wonderful gift to be shared with others. You needn't feel the fear of failure. You should select things according to the pleasure you get in trying. You can donate your time as a volunteer in places

that are in great need of your talents and experience. Children will love you, hospital patients will thank you and your church or temple will grow deeper spiritually from receiving your gifts.

## **When to Seek Help**

If you find the idea of retirement distressing, and you find it difficult to find friends or activities to brighten your expectations, you may want professional help. A professional counselor may help you make some major changes you may feel are needed in your life. You may need help in accepting your situation. Perhaps you're adjusting to the loss of a loved one or are dealing with other life stresses that have left you depressed or distraught. Sometimes, recognizing your need and looking for help from outside resources can be just the boost you need to put the shine into your golden years.

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# Use or Abuse?

## **Diagnosing Dependency**

Dependence on alcohol or other drugs is a widespread problem. Many times, people don't recognize it. Chemical dependency is simply the inability to control the use of some physical substance not being able to quit and not being able to limit how much is used. If you have a dependency problem, recognizing it can help you to move toward a happier and healthier life.

## **Myths**

You might think of a chemically dependent person as someone who can't live without their drink or drugs, who is often drunk or stoned, who uses every day or is irresponsible, immoral, weak-willed or bad. The fact is, a person can be chemically dependent without showing such obvious signs. We are gradually beginning to realize that a person's genetic makeup may affect his or her chances of becoming dependent, and that dependency is often a physical condition that can't be cured by will power alone.

## **Symptoms of Dependency**

Here are some signs that might indicate a chemical dependency problem in you or someone you love:

trying to cut down on or to quit using some substance and failing at it

- "blackouts," or lapses of memory after use
- using the substance while alone or hiding the evidence of use
- using the substance to forget about problems or worries
- doing things while "under the influence" that cause regret afterward
- not being able to enjoy an event without the substance
- neglecting responsibilities in order to use the substance
- family, friends or employer expressing concern about substance use
- being willing to do almost anything to get the substance
- financial or legal problems from using the substance

## **Problems Caused by Dependency**

Chemically dependent people often act unwisely or inappropriately while under the influence of their drug. They may act in ways that will embarrass them later. They may endanger their health and lives, and the lives of others, by having unsafe sex or by driving while intoxicated. They may lose their jobs or families as people around them are hurt by their actions.

## **What to Do**

Recognizing that there's a problem is the first step toward recovering from chemical dependency. If you think you might have a problem of this type, here are some steps you can take:

- Acknowledge the problem openly.
- Limit time spent with people who encourage drug use or drinking.
- Seek professional help from doctors or therapists who deal with chemical dependency and recovery. You might benefit from counseling or a recovery program at a hospital or private clinic.
- Seek out the support of people who are recovering themselves. Many 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, are available for various types of dependencies.

Your employee assistance program can help you find these and other helpful resources or check your phone book.

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# Make Prevention A Priority Today!

Depression and alcoholism are conditions few of us want to discuss openly, especially if you or someone close to you is suffering. The truth is, there is nothing to be ashamed of, and help is available if you take the first step to reach out for treatment. At CONTACT we are here to help you begin the recovery process with our programs aimed at helping members with alcohol or depression issues.

As your behavioral health care provider, CONTACT is committed to helping members stay active and healthy. CONTACT actively promotes prevention and early detection of behavioral health disorders by making members aware of potential risks to their emotional health. During stressful times anyone may be at heightened risk for various mental health or substance abuse disorders. By providing clear, concise information, our prevention and wellness program helps members of all ages to stay mentally fit and lead safer, happier lives.

## Depression Screenings

For those who suffer from depression, the dark, lonely world they exist in is very real one family and friends often find hard to understand. But the good news is that depression is treatable. CONTACT encourages all members to participate in a free, anonymous, depression screening program located at [www.contactbhs.com](http://www.contactbhs.com) to determine the likelihood of your having depression.

Depression Screening does not take the place of a face-to-face assessment with a mental health provider or primary care physician. In fact, we strongly suggest you discuss the screening results with your treatment professional for proper diagnosis and treatment.

Our Depression Screening program began in February 1999

## Coordination Between Behavioral Health and Primary Care By Rob Neely

Have you ever wondered how all the doctors and nurses you see know what others are doing to most effectively coordinate your care? After receiving your written consent, we ask CONTACT behavioral health practitioners to provide information regarding your treatment to your primary care physician (PCP).

At CONTACT, we believe that behavioral health care must be carefully coordinated with general medical care. This is to ensure that you receive seamless, continuous and appropriate care. Behavioral problems such as depression and anxiety can certainly have a medical basis. Conversely, medical or surgical problems may be accompanied by behavioral complications or even "mask" underlying behavioral problems. For this reason, CONTACT believes that appropriate information sharing and careful monitoring of medication usage are especially important when you use medical and behavioral health care systems simultaneously.

CONTACT's behavioral health practitioners tell us that your involvement is the key to this vital information sharing. When our practitioners are asked, "What makes it more likely that you will share information with a patient's PCP?" they most frequently respond "When my patient

and is proving to be very successful. As of the end of the Third Quarter 2001, 3,967 individuals have completed our online depression screening. The programs are helping to make a positive impact on early identification and appropriate referral for CONTACT members with depression.

## Alcohol Screenings

If you have a problem with drug or alcohol abuse, you and your loved ones probably live on a roller coaster that everyone wants to get off and no one knows how to stop. Perhaps you've tried before and fallen off the proverbial wagon too many times to count, or maybe you've secretly wanted to stop but are too afraid to try.

CONTACT is aware that unidentified substance abuse problems contribute to poorer overall treatment outcomes, and this program helps those individuals who may have such problems to receive specialty care.

Alcohol screening helps identify members struggling with alcohol addiction. The program helps determine proper referral and treatment of our members who have an alcohol issue. CONTACT has been working hard to ensure that all members in need of these services receive them, and our efforts have succeeded. As of Third Quarter 2001, 694 individuals have taken our alcohol screening. Since the program was initiated, screenings of members have increased, and we will be working to improve these results even further.

Our preventive health programs were designed expressly with you and your family in mind. We hope you will access our depression and alcohol screening sites. Taking the time now may help you and your loved ones stay healthier and stress-resistant tomorrow. Isn't it time to invest in your personal well-being?

asks me to."

Here are a few hints for keeping information flowing among your practitioners:

- Make a list of the doctors, nurses and therapists (name, address, phone number) that you see regularly, even if regularly is only once a year.
- Beside each health care practitioner's name, list the health problem each person is treating.
- Sign a consent form permitting your health care practitioner to share specific information with others that you specify. Make sure you know what information will be shared and remember, you can restrict sharing of personal or private information. This information can only be released with your permission.
- Keep a current list of your medications to show each health care practitioner you see.
- Have your questions ready before your appointment so you don't forget to ask the ones that are important to you. Write them down if necessary.
- Remember to make one of those questions, "Have you spoken with my PCP about my care?"

