

# Screening for depression recommended for adults, including pregnant and postpartum women

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The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) is recommending screening for depression in the general adult population, including pregnant and postpartum women, and that screening should be implemented with adequate systems in place to ensure accurate diagnosis, effective treatment, and appropriate follow-up. The report appears in the January 26 issue of *JAMA*.

This recommendation is a USPSTF grade B recommendation, meaning that there is high certainty that the net benefit is moderate, or there is moderate certainty that the net benefit is moderate to substantial.

Depression is among the leading causes of disability in persons 15 years and older. It affects individuals, families, businesses, and society and is common in patients seeking care in the primary care setting, and also common in postpartum and pregnant women. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) reviewed the evidence in

the medical literature on the benefits and harms of [screening](#) for [depression](#) in adult populations, including older adults and pregnant and postpartum women; the accuracy of depression screening instruments; and the benefits and harms of depression treatment in these populations. The USPSTF is an independent, volunteer panel of experts that makes recommendations about the effectiveness of specific preventive care services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications. This report is an update of a 2009 USPSTF recommendation statement. The USPSTF continues to recommend that adults 18 and older be screened for depression.

## Detection, and Benefits of Early Detection, Intervention and Treatment

The USPSTF found convincing evidence that screening improves the accurate identification of adult patients with depression in primary care settings, including pregnant and postpartum women, and found adequate evidence that programs combining depression screening with adequate support systems in place improve clinical outcomes (i.e., reduction or remission of depression symptoms) in adults, including pregnant and postpartum women. The USPSTF found convincing evidence that treatment of adults and older adults with depression identified through screening in primary care settings with antidepressants, psychotherapy, or both decreases clinical morbidity. The USPSTF also found adequate evidence that treatment with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) improves clinical outcomes in pregnant and postpartum women with depression.

## Harms of Early Detection, Intervention and Treatment

The USPSTF found adequate evidence that the magnitude of harms of screening for depression in adults is small to none and that the magnitude of harms of treatment with CBT in postpartum and pregnant women is small to none. The USPSTF found that second-generation antidepressants (mostly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors [SSRIs]) are associated with some harms, such as an increase in suicidal behaviors in adults age 18 to 29 years and an increased risk of upper gastrointestinal bleeding in adults older than 70 years, with risk increasing with age; however, the magnitude of these risks is, on average, small. The USPSTF also found evidence of potential serious fetal harms from pharmacologic treatment of depression in [pregnant women](#), but the likelihood of these serious harms is low. Therefore, the USPSTF concludes that the overall magnitude of harms is small to moderate.

## Screening

The optimal timing and interval for screening for depression is not known. A pragmatic approach might include screening all adults who have not been screened previously and using clinical judgment in consideration of risk factors, comorbid conditions, and life events to determine if additional screening of high-risk patients is warranted. Positive screening results should lead to additional assessment that considers severity of depression and comorbid psychological problems, alternate diagnoses, and medical conditions.

## Treatment and Interventions

Effective treatment of depression in adults generally includes antidepressants or specific psychotherapy approaches, alone or in combination. Given the potential harms to the fetus and newborn child from certain pharmacologic agents, clinicians are encouraged to consider evidence-based counseling interventions when managing depression in pregnant or breastfeeding women.

## USPSTF Assessment

The USPSTF concludes with at least moderate certainty that there is a moderate net benefit to

screening for depression in adults 18 years and older, including older adults, who receive care in clinical practices that have adequate systems in place to ensure accurate diagnosis, effective treatment, and appropriate follow-up after screening. The USPSTF also concludes with at least moderate certainty that there is a moderate net benefit to screening for depression in pregnant and [postpartum women](#) who receive care in clinical practices that have CBT or other evidence-based counseling available after screening.

Michael E. Thase, M.D., of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, comments on the USPSTF recommendations in an accompanying editorial.

"Until there are better methods to match patients with specific forms of treatment, the best hope to improve on a B grade for patients with depression may be to adapt care systems to respond more flexibly and decisively to key events that are associated with nonadherence or treatment failure. For example, if the clinicians working within a collaborative care model could rapidly incorporate the information that an initial prescription was not filled or was not refilled, it may be possible to diminish the chances that nonadherence will compromise treatment outcome."

"Likewise, given evidence that nonresponse is predicted by a lack of symptom improvement during the first 14 days of therapy, web-based monitoring of symptoms early in the course of therapy may enable physicians and other mental health professionals to intervene more rapidly and reduce the chances of treatment failure. The same approach to ongoing care could be used to facilitate a more timely transition through [treatment](#) algorithms and more expeditious referral to specialty care."

**More information:** *JAMA*, [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2015.18392](#)

*JAMA*, [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2015.18406](#)

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