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## Depression and Aging

### **Depression and aging**

- Older adults often face health challenges and life changes that may put them at greater risk for depression.
- But depression is not a normal part of aging. It is a treatable condition that requires medical attention.
- With the right treatment, older adults can get relief from the symptoms of depression.

### **Depression is not a normal part of growing older**

Depression is a true medical condition that is treatable, like diabetes or hypertension.

- It is not just having "the blues" or the emotions we feel when grieving the loss of a loved one.

Although depression is not a normal part of aging, older adults often experience challenges related to health or changes in life circumstances. This may put them at increased risk for depression.

- Approximately 4% of older adults aged 70 and over have depression.

### **Symptoms of depression**

This is a list of common symptoms of depression. People experience depression differently, so there may be symptoms that are not on this list:

- Feeling sad, empty, or hopeless often or all the time.
- Not wanting to do activities that used to be fun.
- Weight gain or loss, or changes in appetite.
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or sleeping too much.

- Feeling irritable, easily frustrated, or restless.
- Lack of energy or feeling tired.
- Feeling worthless or overly guilty.
- Trouble concentrating, remembering things, or making decisions.
- Thinking about suicide or hurting yourself.

## **Older adults and depression**

Depression is more common in:

- People who have medical conditions like heart disease or cancer.
- People whose daily functioning becomes limited.
- People with sleep problems.

People with more than one health condition are more likely to experience depression:

- Most older adults have at least one chronic health condition.
- Half of older adults have two or more health conditions.

## **Older adults often don't get the care they need for mental health**

Older adults often do not seek help for depression.

- They may think their symptoms are a normal part of getting older.
- They may feel stigma or shame about feeling depressed.
- They may not understand that they could feel better with the right treatment.

Older adults may also face barriers to treatment, including:

- Difficulty getting care because of costs, problems with transportation, or a lack of mental health services.
- Healthcare professionals may not adequately diagnose or treat depression in older adults.
  - They may confuse the symptoms with physical illness, leading to underdiagnosis.
  - They may not be trained to provide appropriate screening or treatment for mental health in older adults.

## **What you can do**

The good news is that depression only affects a small proportion of older adults. And it is treatable.

### **If you are concerned about a loved one, you can help them by:**

- Encouraging them to get help and ask what they need for support.
- Offering to go with them to talk to a health care provider.
- Joining them for walks or other physical activities. This gives you a chance to connect with them and there are emotional benefits to exercising!

## **Treatment Works**

Effective treatments are available, including:

- Medication for depression.
- Psychotherapy.
- A combination of both.

Most older adults see an improvement in their symptoms when treated.

## **National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**

Get help right away if you or someone you care about is in crisis.

If you or someone you care about is in crisis, please get help immediately. Options include:

- If you are suicidal or in emotional distress, call or text the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 to talk to a trained counselor. You can also chat online at [chat.988lifeline.org](https://chat.988lifeline.org).
- In life-threatening situations, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Learn more about the [National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#).

## **Resources**

- [National Institute on Aging, Depression and Older Adults](#)
- [National Institute on Mental Health, Older Adults, and Depression](#)

- [SAMHSA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\) Resources for Older Adults](#)
- [Health Effects of Social Isolation and Loneliness](#)
- [Healthy IDEAS: Identifying Depression & Empowering Activities for Seniors](#)
- [Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives \(PEARLS\) Toolkit](#)

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