

Depression & Older Adults

Have you ever suffered from extended periods of sadness, loss of pleasure in everyday activities, poor sleep, or feelings of worthlessness or guilt? Have you quickly lost or gained weight, or lost all energy to complete everyday tasks? If so, you may be experiencing symptoms of depression. Contrary to stereotypes about aging, depression is not a “normal” part of getting older. It is a medical problem that affects many older adults and can often be successfully treated.

A recent study from the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry found that 27% of older adults assessed by aging service providers met the criteria for a diagnosis of major depression, and 31% had symptoms of depression that didn't qualify as a diagnosable disorder, but significantly impacted their lives.

Identifying Risk Factors for Depression

Depression is often under-recognized and under-treated in older adults. Without treatment, depression can impair an older adult's ability to function and enjoy life, and can contribute to poorer overall health. Compared to older adults without depression, those with depression often need greater assistance with self-care and daily living activities, and often recover more slowly from physical disorders. Use the checklist below to determine if you or someone you know may be at risk for depression.

Symptoms of Depression

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Disturbed sleep
- Weight loss or gain
- Lack of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or extreme guilt
- Difficulties with concentration or decision making
- Noticeable restlessness or slow movement
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide, or an attempt of suicide

Check for Risk Factors

- Medical illness (particularly chronic health conditions associated with disability or decline)
- Overall feelings of poor health, disability, or chronic pain
- Progressive sensory loss (i.e. deteriorating eye sight or hearing loss)
- A history of falling repeatedly
- Sleep disturbances
- Mental impairment or dementia



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- Medication side effects (in particular from benzodiazepines, narcotics, beta blockers, corticosteroids, and hormones)
- Alcohol or prescription medication misuse or abuse
- Prior depressive episode, or family history of depression
- Extended mourning due to death of a friend, family member, or other loss
- Any type of stressful life events (i.e. financial difficulties, new illness/disability, change in living situation, retirement or job loss, and interpersonal conflict)
- Dissatisfaction with one's social network

Treatment Options

The most common and effective treatment for depression is a combination of therapy and medication, but some people may benefit from just one form of treatment. If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of depression, you should seek professional help immediately.

Works Cited

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