

May is Mental Health Month

Facts about Mental Health and Older Adults

Depression is not a normal part of aging. Depression is a true and treatable medical condition, not a normal part of aging. While most older adults are *not* depressed, they do have an increased risk. If you are concerned about a loved one, offer to go with him or her to see a health care provider to be diagnosed and treated.

How Do I Know if It's Depression?

Depression is not just having "the blues" or the emotions we feel when grieving the loss of a loved one. It is a true medical condition that is treatable, like diabetes or hypertension. Someone who is depressed has feelings of sadness or anxiety that last for weeks at a time. He or she may also experience:

- Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness
- Irritability or restlessness
- Loss of interest in usual activities or hobbies
- Fatigue and decreased energy

Older adults are at increased risk. About 80% of older adults have at least one chronic health condition, and 50% have two or more. Depression is more common in people who also have other illnesses (such as heart disease or cancer) or whose function becomes limited.

Older adults are often misdiagnosed and undertreated. Healthcare providers may mistake an older adult's symptoms of depression as just a natural reaction to illness or the life changes that may occur as we age. Older adults themselves often share this belief and do not seek help because they don't understand that they could feel better with appropriate treatment.

How Do I Find Help?

Most older adults see an improvement in their symptoms when treated with anti-depression drugs, psychotherapy, or a combination of both. If you are concerned about a loved one being depressed, offer to go with him or her to see a health care provider to be diagnosed and treated. If you or someone you care about is in crisis, please seek help immediately by calling 911 or going to a nearby emergency department. **For referrals to a treatment provider, call the Washington Recovery Help Line: 1-866-789-1511.**

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Other Resources:

[A Guide to Mental Wellness in Older Age](#)

[Mental Health and Aging](#)

[Older Americans Behavioral Health: Issue Brief Series](#)

[Older Adults and Mental Health: A guide for planning and advisory councils](#)

[Self-advocacy and Health Care for Older Adults with Mental Illnesses](#)

For more information: panekkm@dshs.wa.gov or 306) 725-1400.

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services – Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery