

Depression in Older Adults/Seniors

Because many older adults/seniors face illnesses along with social and economic issues, depression is often mistakenly considered a normal consequence of the aging process.

Facts: Depression is considered the most common mental disorder, afflicting up to five percent of people age 65 and older. Many researchers think this is a low estimate, due to the fact that depression may mimic dementia, with as much as ten percent of those diagnosed with dementia actually having depression. Fortunately, depression is a condition that responds well to treatment, with many people experiencing improvement within weeks of beginning treatment.

What can Contribute to Depression in Seniors?

- Seniors tend to take more medications than younger adults, with the medications themselves often resulting in depressions as a side effect
- Seniors are more likely to experience significant and multiple loss such as a spouse, friends, or other family
- Seniors may have less access and ability to participate in activities they once enjoyed
- Seniors often experience financial problems with little or no opportunity for additional income
- Seniors are often experience a loss of independence
- Certain illness, common to seniors, frequently have depression as a co-existing condition

Signs and symptoms:

- Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Low self esteem and increased feeling of guilt and or helplessness
- Increased irritability, anger, restlessness or hostility
- Decreased interest in activities or hobbies once enjoyed
- Persistent fatigue, low energy/motivation
- Poor concentration, memory, and indecisiveness/forgetfulness
- Insomnia, early – morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Major change in eating, overeating or loss of appetite
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self destructive behavior
- Persistent physical illnesses such as aches and pains, headaches, or digestive problems
- Social isolation
- Drug or alcohol abuse

Seeking Help: If you suspect an older adult/senior is suffering from depression, help them make an appointment to talk with a qualified mental health professional who can assess his/her needs. You can also call the National Association for Mental Illness help line at 800-950-6264 or go to their web site at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>. Correctly diagnosing depression in older adults is the first step toward successful treatment and improving their quality of life.