



Late Life Depression: A Fact Sheet to Share

Depression is not a normal part of aging but over 58% of older adults think it is. Late-life depression affects an estimated six million older adults, yet only 10% of these people get treatment. Depression is both unrecognized and untreated among many older adults. Too often, symptoms are confused with other physical conditions. Getting treatment can improve both your daily life and your health.

Knowing Your Risk of Depression

Older adults are more at risk for depression than other age groups due to medical problems and stressful life occurrences that are common in later life. Recognizing your risk or symptoms you have are the first step towards treatment. Remember that depression is not a natural part of aging and can be treated with help from a professional.

Risk factors linked to late life depression include:

- Conditions associated with disability, decline or illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, cancer or diabetes
- Perceived or self-reported poor health, disability or chronic pain
- Stressful life occurrences such as financial difficulties, new illnesses, change of living situation, retirement, job loss, relationship problems
- Loss of friends or loved ones
- Dissatisfaction with social network, disconnection from community or feeling isolated
- Medication side effects
- Prior history of depression or family history of depression
- Alcohol or drug (prescription or over-the-counter) misuse or abuse

Symptom and Warning Signs of Depression

When several of the following symptoms occur nearly every day for two or more weeks, it could mean that a person has depression and help should be sought:

- Difficulty concentrating, focusing and making decisions
- An ongoing sad, empty or anxious mood
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling slowed down
- Increased agitation and restlessness
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Loss of interest in ordinary or pleasurable activities

- Change in appetite and/or sleep patterns
- Increased physical complaints and/or pain for which there is no physical explanation
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, hopelessness or strong negativity
- Confusion and/or memory problems
- Irritability, anger, anxiety
- Neglect of self-care
- Suicidal thoughts

Reasons to Get Treated

- More than 80% of people with depression improve when they receive appropriate treatment with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of the two.
- Untreated depression makes pain and other health care problems worse. For this reason, healthcare costs are nearly 50% higher than older adults who do not have depression.ⁱ
- Those with untreated depression often require more assistance with self-care and other daily activities than other older adults. Getting treatment means more independence and autonomy.ⁱⁱ
- Older adults are considered the group most at risk for suicide. The suicide rate in older adults is more than double that of any other population.

For information about finding treatment, look for the Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging's fact sheet "[Accessing Mental Health Care in Maryland.](#)"

More information can be found on the website www.mdaging.org

If you would like more information or assistance, contact Kim Burton at:

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ⁱ Unutzer, J., "Depressive Symptoms and the Cost of Health Services in HMO Patients Aged 65 Years and Older," *JAMA* 227; 20 (1997).

ⁱⁱ "Older Americans Behavioral Health Issue Brief 6: Depression and Anxiety: Screening and Intervention" developed for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, [by Johnson, Bassin & Shaw Inc., 5515 Security Lane, Rockville, MD 20852] under Contract No. HHSS2832007000031.