

Depression In The Elderly: How to Increase Quality of Life in Our Older Years

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Faculty

**Carolyn O'Bryan, LCSW, PIP
Home Health Social Work Consultant
Bureau of Home & Community Services
Alabama Department of Public Health**

Objectives

- Describe how depression affects the health of elderly patients
- Understand why depression is difficult to recognize in the elderly
- Recognize symptoms of depression in elderly adults

Objectives

- Name the major causes of depression in the elderly
- Know the resources available to help your clients who are depressed

Emotional Well Being In Older Adults

- Why be concerned?
 - Depression is not just part of the aging process
 - The highest rate of suicide is among white males 65 years or older

Emotional Well Being In Older Adults

- Why be concerned?
 - According to the National Institute of Health, two million adults have major depression
 - An additional five million suffer from less severe forms of the illness

Why Be Concerned?

- Emotional health impacts physical health
 - Men with poor coping skills become ill four times more often than men with stronger coping skills
 - Close family ties and a cohesive community are strong predictors of health

Why Be Concerned?

- Emotional health impacts physical health
 - Depression increases the incidence of coronary heart disease
- Depression increases the likelihood of death from physical illnesses

Why Be Concerned?

- Depression can cause a medical disorder to worsen
- Untreated depression can interfere with a patient's ability to follow his treatment regimen
- Depression tends to last longer in the elderly

Why Be Concerned?

- Healthcare costs of elderly people with significant symptoms of depression are roughly 50% higher than those of non-depressed seniors
- Depressed seniors are more likely to
 - Rate their health as poor
 - Visit an emergency
 - Have more doctor's visits

Why Is It So Hard to Diagnose in the Elderly?

- Older people often do not seek help
 - They believe their depression is part of aging
 - Many seniors are reluctant to talk about their feelings or seek help
 - Often masked by physical illness
 - Mistaken for dementia

Why Is It So Hard To Diagnose?

- Seniors are often isolated, so no one is present to recognize symptoms
- Doctors often focus on physical symptoms and not on depression
- Alcohol dependence as self-medication can mask signs of depression

Symptoms Of Major Depression

- Depressed mood most of the day
- Not interested in their usual activities
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Unable to sleep
- Very slow in their movements
- Loss of energy nearly every day

Symptoms Of Depression

- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- Unable to think, concentrate, or make decisions
- Thoughts of death

Depression Symptoms Specific To Seniors

- Unexplained or aggravated aches and pains
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Anxieties and worries
- Memory problems
- Loss of feeling or pleasure
- Demanding behavior

Depression Symptoms Specific To Seniors

- Lack of interest in personal care
- Social withdrawal
- Sleep disturbances
 - Daytime sleepiness
 - Difficulty falling asleep
 - Multiple mid-night awakenings
 - Early morning awakening

Depression Symptoms Specific To Seniors

- Confusion, delusions, or hallucinations
- Prolonged grief after a loss
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts

Causes Of Depression

- Psychological factors
- Environmental factors
- Physical factors
- Personality traits
- Medications

Psychological Factors

- Unresolved, repressed traumatic experiences from childhood or later life may surface when a senior slows down
- Previous history of depression
- Fear of death
- Frustration with memory loss
- Substance abuse

Psychological Factors

- Damage of body image
 - Amputation
 - Cancer
 - Surgery
 - Heart attack

Psychological Factors

- Difficulty adjusting to stressful or changing conditions
 - Housing and living conditions
 - Loss of loved ones or friends
 - Loss of capabilities

Environmental Factors

- Loneliness and isolation
- Retirement
- Being unmarried, especially widowed
- Recent bereavement
- Lack of friends or family
- Decreased mobility due to illness or loss of driving privileges

Physical Factors

- Depression runs in the family
- Co-occurring illness such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, cancer, diabetes or stroke
- Vascular changes in the brain
- A vitamin B-12 deficiency
 - Unclear if this is caused by poor eating habits or depression
- Chronic or severe pain

Personality Traits

- Low self-esteem
- Extreme dependency on others
- Pessimism
- Lack of coping skills

Medications

- Some pain medications
- Some drugs for high blood pressure
- Hormones
 - Estrogen
 - Progesterone
 - Cortisol
 - Prednisone
 - Anabolic steroids

Medications

- Some heart medications
 - Digitalis
 - Propanalol
- Anticancer agents
 - Cycloserine
 - Tamoxifen
 - Nolvadex
 - Velban
 - Oncovin

Medications

- Some drugs for Parkinson's disease
 - Levadopa
 - Bromocriptine
- Some drugs for arthritis
 - Indomethacin

Medications

- Some tranquilizers/anti-anxiety drugs
 - Valium
 - Halcyon
- Alcohol

How Do I Help My Patients?

- Emotional well being depends on a well rounded lifestyle
 - Taking care of the mind, body and spirit

How Can I Help?

- If you are concerned that one of your patients may be depressed, speak with the Nurse Care Coordinator about your concerns
- If patient is expressing suicidal ideations, contact the Nurse Care Coordinator or your supervisor immediately

How Can I Help?

- Listen
 - Give your full attention to the patient at each visit
- Encourage the patient to talk about the past
 - Can help people learn & grow from their experience, can be a reminder of how much they are loved, & how they have helped others

How Can I Help?

- Allow patient to discuss their faith and/or spirituality
 - A key factor in a person's mental well being

How Can I Help?

- Don't change the subject when the patient pauses
 - Depression often slows a patient's responses
 - They need additional time to gather their thoughts

How Can I Help?

- Acknowledge sadness, irritability, or withdrawal
- Do not judge the patient
- Do not give advice
- Praise every accomplishment no matter how small
- Be honest and promote realistic expectations

How Can I Help?

- Encourage patient to maintain a healthy diet
- Encourage the patient's interests
 - Gardening
 - Music
 - Pets
 - Books

How Can I Help?

- Encourage patient to relax to clear the mind of their worries and anxieties
- Encourage exercise at the level they can accomplish
 - Physical activity decreases symptoms of depression