

What is depression?

Depression is a common condition that affects people of all ages. There are many aspects of aging which can put older adults at particular risk of becoming depressed. Major life stressors such as loss of a loved one, decreased independence, chronic disease, chronic pain, and social isolation become increasingly common as we age. Experiencing grief and sadness in response to these life changes is natural, but those sad feelings eventually lessen, our lives adjust, and we can move on.

Depression is different. It is a medical condition that interferes with daily life and functioning. It is not a normal part of aging, a weakness, or a flaw. Depression can effect anyone at any time in their lives. It is important that we know the signs so we can identify it in ourselves or those close to us.



Are You Depressed?

Depression in older adults: What to look for



Do you feel very tired, hopeless, or
helpless?

Do you feel irritable or anxious?

Do you have trouble sleeping, concentrating
or remembering things?

Have you lost interest in things you used to
enjoy?

These could be signs that you are depressed.

What are the signs of depression?

Depression can be different in different people. Many of the symptoms of depression can be misconstrued as symptoms of other medical problems or normal changes with aging. Feeling persistently down or depressed is a sign of depression, but there are many other symptoms that may be more apparent. Other signs to look for include:

- Decreased interest in activities you previously enjoyed
- Feeling anxious
- Irritability or restlessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, or hopelessness
- Fatigue and lack of energy
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes in appetite (increased or decreased)
- Trouble with memory, concentration or making decisions
- Thoughts of hurting yourself, or suicide
- Aches, pains, headaches, cramps, digestive problems without a clear physical cause and that do not respond to treatment

How can depression impact you?

Depression can have a serious impact on your quality of life and level of function. The physical and mental symptoms of depression can make it difficult to accomplish the day to day tasks that are necessary to maintain independence. Additionally, depression can exacerbate the impact of other medical conditions, again making it even more difficult to function day to day. That is why the impact can be particularly great on older patients who are already suffering from other chronic conditions.

That is why it is so important to seek treatment and talk to your doctor if you think you may be suffering from depression.



How can you get help?

If you think you might be suffering from depression it is important to bring your concerns to your doctor. Your doctor may start by asking more specific questions about how you are feeling and what you are experiencing. It is important to be as open and honest as possible so that your doctor has all of the accurate information. Your doctor may run further tests to rule out other conditions which may be contributing to your depression.

If you are diagnosed with depression there are many different types of treatment available. The right treatment is different for everyone. Treatment options include psychotherapy as well as medications and often a combination of both is the most effective. Your doctor will work with you to find the best options for you.