

# seniors and depression

## the difference between depression and dementia



“Unmarried and widowed individuals as well as those who lack supportive social network also have elevated rates of depression.”

Depression is a mood disorder; dementias like Alzheimer’s disease, can have similar symptoms but they are different illnesses and have different treatment plans. It’s important to know what to look for to help determine what illness you might be dealing with. Only a doctor can make a diagnosis however so if you experience any of the symptoms of either illness see your doctor right away.

### Depression Symptoms

- Feeling unhappy most of the time
- Worrying a lot or feel anxious or panicky
- Getting restless and irritable
- Feeling life is pointless and not worth living
- Getting lonely or bored
- Crying a lot for no apparent reason
- Not caring how you look
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling tired even when you’re not doing much
- Finding it a struggle to do simple chores
- Having thoughts of harming yourself
- Having difficulty remembering things
- Finding it hard to make decisions
- Dwelling on things that happened in the past
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Worrying that you are seriously ill
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Losing confidence in yourself
- Experiencing a loss of appetite or weight

## **Alzheimer's Disease Symptoms** (Source: Alzheimer Society of BC, [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org))

- Memory loss that affects day-to-day function
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation of time and place
- Poor or decreased judgement
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Misplacing things
- Changes in mood or behavior
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative

As you can see there are differences between the symptoms of depression and of Alzheimer's disease and mainly the differences are related to memory. While there can be mood changes associated with the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, this type of dementia is more of a cognitive disorder rather than a mood disorder like depression. Memory problems can also be associated with depression however so remember only a medical professional like your doctor can correctly diagnose your symptoms.

### **Risk Factors for Depression**

Some people are more likely to experience depression. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness ([www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)), "Older women are at a greater risk because women in general are twice as likely as men to become seriously depressed. Biological factors like hormonal changes may make older women more vulnerable. The stresses of maintaining relationships or caring for an ill loved one and children also typically fall more heavily on women, which could contribute to higher rates of depression. Unmarried and widowed individuals as well as those who lack supportive social network also have elevated rates of depression. Conditions such as heart attack, stroke, hip fracture or macular degeneration and procedures such as bypass surgery are known to be associated with the development of depression."

(National Alliance on Mental Illness , 2013)

### **Risk Factors for Dementia Diseases like Alzheimer's Disease**

According to the Alzheimer Society of BC some people have increased risk of being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. There are some risk factors that one cannot control like age, gender and genetics and there are risk factors one does have some control over. In terms of age, "In Canada, 1 in 20 people over the age of 65 is affected by Alzheimer's Disease. For people over 85 years, the likelihood of having dementia increases to approximately 1 in 4 people." (Alzheimer Society BC, 2013). Women are more likely to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and if it runs in your family you are even more at risk.

There are risk factors that can be controlled and they include having diabetes, heart problems, and brain injuries. Keeping your body as healthy as possible will reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

If you or your loved one is experiencing some of the above symptoms of either depression or Alzheimer's disease, please see your doctor.

Below are some resources for more information.

Mood Disorders Association of BC [www.mdabc.net](http://www.mdabc.net), 604.873.0103, toll free 1.855.282.7979

BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health [www.ccsmh.ca](http://www.ccsmh.ca), 416.785.2500 ext. 6331

Alzheimer's Society of BC [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org)



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