

seniors and depression

information for friends and family

information to help you recognize the signs and take action



Have you noticed that your senior loved one seems unhappy or more anxious, irritable or moody? Maybe you notice that they are quieter than they once were and have stopped doing things they were once interested in. Perhaps they are isolating themselves by not seeing friends and relatives as much. Interruptions in sleep and eating patterns are also concerns and all these signs can indicate your senior loved one is experiencing depression.

Why we might not recognize depression in seniors

Sometimes depression signs or symptoms are missed because people choose to hide how they are feeling; there is stigma associated with depression. Often seniors worry about taking medications, about being seen as ‘crazy’ and about losing their independence; loss of independence can be especially troubling for seniors who do not want to be moved to a care facility. Also in our senior population depression can be misdiagnosed as dementia. Finally, some believe that depression is a natural part of aging; this is not true, depression is an illness.

Depression is treatable

The most important thing to remember is that depression is treatable and early detection increases the effectiveness of treatment plans. If your loved one is exhibiting symptoms of depression, discuss it with your loved one and encourage an immediate appointment with a physician.

Depression is
highly treatable.

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Causes of Depression – Risk Factors for Seniors

The causes of depression vary from person to person. Sometimes there is no obvious reason and other times depression can be triggered by a distressing life event. Seniors can face some higher risks of depression because of ill health, feeling lonely or isolated especially after the death of a spouse, friend or pet, needing more care and help with basic daily tasks of living, having financial worries and taking medications with depressive side effects. Seniors may need to move to a care facility and may face losing not only their independence but their homes and belongings.

Common Symptoms of Depression

- Feel unhappy most of the time
- Worry a lot or feel anxious/panicky
- Get restless and irritable
- Feel life is pointless and not worth living
- Get very lonely or bored
- Cry a lot for no apparent reason
- Not care how you look
- Sleep too much or too little
- Feel tired even when you're not doing much
- Find it a struggle to do simple chores
- Have difficulty remembering things
- Find it hard to make decisions
- Dwell on things that happened in the past
- Have unexplained aches and pains
- Worry that you are seriously ill
- Withdraw from family and friends
- Lose confidence in yourself
- Experience a loss of appetite or weight
- Have thoughts of harming yourself

Talk openly to your loved one about any concerns you have about depression

If your senior loved one has been experiencing some of the symptoms of depression for more than two weeks or if you have other causes to suspect that they are depressed, discuss it with them and book an appointment with a doctor immediately.

Suggested ways to start talking about symptoms of depression

It is often difficult for people suffering from depression to ask for help. If you notice signs of depression, ask questions about how your loved one is feeling. Avoid judging or minimizing your loved one's problems or giving them advice. Remember it can be hard for people to talk about their feelings especially if they are worried about the consequence of telling the truth. When you hear things that may indicate a problem with depression encourage your loved one to see their doctor right away. Offer to help them call the doctor and go to the appointment.

It's important for our senior loved ones to know it's good to talk about how they are feeling and we as families and friends care about what they are experiencing. Let them know there is help and hope; depression is treatable no matter what one's age.

Below are some resources for more information.

Mood Disorders Association of BC www.mdabc.net, 604.873.0103, toll free 1.855.282.7979

BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, www.heretohelp.bc.ca

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health www.ccsmh.ca, 416.785.2500 ext. 6331

Crisis Centre Seniors' Distress Line 604.872.1234, www.crisiscentre.bc.ca



Mood Disorders association of British Columbia

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