



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Depression and Older Adults

By John M. Ramsdell, MPA MA LMHC
Contact at: jramsdell@fchn.com

Depression is more than just feeling sad or blue. It is a common but serious mood disorder that needs treatment. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, and working. When you have depression, you have trouble with daily life for weeks at a time. Doctors call this condition "depressive disorder" or "clinical depression."

Depression is a real illness. It is not a sign of a person's weakness or a character flaw. You can't "snap out of" clinical depression. Most people who experience depression need treatment to get better.

Depression Is Not a Normal Part of Aging

Depression is a common problem among older adults, but it is NOT a normal part of aging. In fact, studies show that most older adults feel satisfied with their lives, despite having more illnesses or physical problems. However, important life changes that happen as we get older may cause feelings of uneasiness, stress, and sadness.

Recognizing Symptoms of Depression in Older Adults

Depression in older adults may be difficult to recognize because they may show different symptoms than

younger people. For some older adults with depression, sadness is not their main symptom. They may have other, less obvious symptoms of depression, or they may not be willing to talk about their feelings. Therefore, doctors may be less likely to recognize that their patient has depression.

Common Symptoms of Depression

There are many symptoms associated with depression, and some will vary depending on the individual. However, some of the most common symptoms are listed below. If you have several of these symptoms for more than 2 weeks, you may have depression..

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness, or having trouble sitting still
- Loss of interest in once pleasurable activities, including sex
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Eating more or less than usual, usually with unplanned weight gain or loss

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- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease with treatment
- Frequent crying

Treatments for Depression

Depression, even severe depression, can be treated. If you think you may have depression, start by making an appointment to see your doctor or healthcare provider. This could be your primary doctor or a provider who specializes in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions (a psychologist or psychiatrist). Certain medications and some medical conditions can cause the same symptoms as depression. A doctor can rule out these possibilities by doing a physical exam, interview, and lab tests.

If the doctor can find no medical condition that may be causing the depression, the next step is a psychological evaluation. Treatment choices differ for each person, and sometimes multiple treatments must be tried to find one that works. It is important to keep trying until you find something that works for you. The most common forms of treatment for depression are medication and psychotherapy.

Therapy for Depression

Psychotherapy, also called "talk therapy," can help people with depression. Some treatments are short-term, lasting 10 to 20 weeks; others are longer, depending on the person's needs. Cognitive behavioral therapy is one type of talk therapy used to treat depression. It focuses on helping people change negative thinking and any behaviors that may be making depression worse. Interpersonal therapy can help an individual understand and work through troubled relationships that may cause the depression or make it worse. Other types of talk therapy, like problem-solving therapy, can be helpful for people with depression.

Medications for Depression

Antidepressants are medicines that treat depression. There are many different types of antidepressants. They may help improve the way your brain uses certain chemicals that control mood or stress. You may need to try several different antidepressant medicines before finding one that improves your symptoms and has manageable side effects. Antidepressants take time, usually 2 to 4 weeks, to work. Often symptoms such as sleep, appetite, and concentration problems improve before mood lifts, so it is important to give the medication a chance to work before deciding whether it works for you.

Preventing Depression

What can be done to lower the risk of depression? How can people cope? There are a few steps you can take. Try to prepare for major changes in life, such as retirement or moving from your home of many years. Stay in touch with family. Let them know when you feel sad. Regular exercise may also help prevent depression or lift your mood if you are depressed. Pick something you like to do. Being physically fit and eating a balanced diet may help avoid illnesses that can bring on disability or depression.

Contact Your EAP for Support

Please know that you and your loved one are not alone. Your EAP is available 24/7 to provide professional support when you need someone to talk to, request a referral for free EAP sessions, or seek additional services. Your First Choice Health EAP program can be accessed by phone at (800) 777-4114 or at www.firstchoiceEAP.com using your organization's unique username.

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