



WELLNESS

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

September 2009

This Month's Topic:

Keeping the Glow in the Golden Years

How to Cope with Depression

It's natural for older adults to feel down from time to time. Retirement, loss of a loved one, serious illness or decreased mobility can bring sadness and grief. But, when those feelings persist over time, it may be a sign of clinical depression. It's a serious but treatable condition.

Depression is very common as we age. An estimated 6 million Americans ages 65 and older suffer from it. However, only about 10 percent get treatment. It often is overlooked because people in this age group may not talk about how they're feeling. And, doctors may be less likely to suspect or spot it.

The Mind-Body Connection

Depression affects more than just the mind. It also can impact physical health. For example, it doubles a person's risk of developing cardiac disease. And, it increases the risk of death from illness. In addition, people who are depressed may be less able to recover from an illness.

Daily activities also can be affected. Older adults with depression have higher rates of insomnia and memory loss. They also may have slower reaction times. This can cause problems with driving, cooking and other tasks. In addition, feeling depressed can lead to eating habits that may result in obesity or unhealthy weight loss and diminished energy levels.

Looking for Signs

As a caregiver, friend or family member, you can play a critical role in recognizing the possible warning signs of depression. While no two people have the same experience, the most common symptoms include:

- Sad, blue or empty feelings
- A lack of interest in activities usually enjoyed
- Appetite changes and weight loss or gain
- Neglect of personal appearance, chores and daily responsibilities
- Sleep problems such as trouble getting to sleep, early morning waking or sleeping too much

- Irritability
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- A lack of energy or sense of fatigue
- Recurring aches and pains that seem to have no physical cause
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions

Keep in mind that there is no single sign of depression. If you notice a loved one experiencing several of these symptoms for two weeks or longer, it's best to get an evaluation by a doctor or mental health professional.

Aging is a part of life, but depression doesn't have to be. It's important for those suffering to get the help and support they need. There are treatment options that can be effective regardless of age. United Behavioral Health is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

Helpful Tips for Emotional Well-Being

Here are some suggestions you can offer to help your older loved one keep a positive outlook.

- **Spend time with family and friends.** Being with others can help you feel connected and raise your spirits.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Getting enough sleep will help calm your mind and energize your body.
- **Try out new activities.** Starting a hobby or visiting a new place will challenge your mind.
- **Get involved in your community.** Volunteering or joining a club is a great way to interact with others and feel good about yourself.
- **Take a walk.** Exercising regularly is a great way to clear your mind — and boost your physical health.

How You Can Help

If you know an older adult who may be depressed, one of the most important things you can do is encourage him or her to seek treatment. Here are some tips that can help:

- Make sure the person feels comfortable with accepting help. Explain that there's no shame in seeing a professional for depression. It's no different than going to a doctor for a physical illness.
- Express concern and remind him or her that some problems can become too difficult for anyone to deal with alone. Professional counselors and therapists know how to help people work through their problems.
- If the person is hesitant to seek treatment, you can suggest trying at least one session. Or, offer to go along.

- Recommend that the person speak with his or her regular doctor, who can do an exam and recommend treatment. A medication may be prescribed, if appropriate.

If he or she refuses to seek help at first, don't be critical or apply too much pressure. Be supportive and show you care.

Resources:

Use the search word "depression" to learn more about the condition and treatment options.

Use the search phrase "older adult" to learn more about depression and other concerns that may affect your loved ones later in life.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): United Behavioral Health (UBH)

Toll-free number: 1-866-248-4105 (7 days/24 hours)

Access code: 61570

www.liveandworkwell.com

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