



Older Adults and Mental Health

Overview

It's just as important for an older person with symptoms of depression to seek treatment as it is for someone younger. The impact of depression on health in older adults can be severe: much research has reported that depression is associated with worse health in people with conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and stroke. Depression can complicate the treatment of these conditions, including making it more difficult for someone to care for him- or herself and to seek treatment when needed. In older adults, depression may be disregarded as frailty, or it may be viewed as an inevitable result of life changes, chronic illness, and disability. Recognizing the signs and seeing a health practitioner is the first step to getting treatment, which can make a real difference in someone's quality of life.

Warning Signs

- Noticeable changes in mood, energy level, or appetite
- Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Difficulty concentrating, feeling restless, or on edge
- Increased worry or feeling stressed
- Anger, irritability or aggressiveness
- Ongoing headaches, digestive issues, or pain
- A need for alcohol or drugs
- Sadness or hopelessness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions
- Engaging in high-risk activities
- Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior
- Thoughts or behaviors that interfere with work, family, or social life
- Unusual thinking or behaviors that concern other people

Latest News



National Institute
of Mental Health

[Electroconvulsive Therapy Lifts Depression, Sustains Remission in Older Adults](#)

July 18, 2016 • Science Update

An individualized program of follow-up treatment with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) combined with an antidepressant was effective in preventing relapse in patients 60 years and older who had had a successful initial course of treatment for severe depression.

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[Antipsychotics Use Among Older Adults Increases with Age](#)

October 21, 2015 • Press Release

Researchers find antipsychotic use among older adults increases with age despite known health risks. In 2010, more than 3/4 of seniors receiving an antipsychotic prescription had no documented clinical psychiatric diagnosis during the year. In addition, among those who did have a diagnosed mental disorder and/or dementia, nearly half of the oldest patients had dementia, regardless of FDA warnings that antipsychotics increase mortality in people with dementia.

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[NIMH Twitter Chat on Depression and Older Adults](#)

December 11, 2013 • Science Update

Join NIMH's Jovier Evans, Ph.D., Chief of the Geriatric Translational Neuroscience Program, for a Twitter Chat on depression and older adults.

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Health Topics and Resources

Featured Health Topics

- [Anxiety Disorders](#)
- [Bipolar Disorder \(Manic-Depressive Illness\)](#)
- [Coping with Traumatic Events](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Eating Disorders](#)
- [Medications: Older Adults](#)
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#)
- [Suicide Prevention](#)

Featured Brochures and Factsheets



Federal Resources

- [Depression is Not a Normal Part of Growing Older](#) from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Health Information for Older Adults](#) from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Men: Stay Healthy at 50+](#) Learn more about staying healthy for men over 50 from the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#).
- [NIH Senior Health](#), with resources from the NIH for people over 60 to find answers to their medical questions.
- [Women: Stay Healthy at 50+](#) Learn more about staying healthy for women over 50 from the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#).
- [Seniors' Health Information and Organizations](#) from NLM's MedlinePlus ([en Español](#))

Health Hotlines

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** If you or someone you know is in a crisis, get help immediately. You can call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Line at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. The lifeline is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. By calling the hotline number, you'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area 24/7.
- **Disaster Distress Helpline:** People affected by natural or human-caused disasters can call this helpline, sponsored by the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA), to receive immediate counseling. Calling 1-800-985-5990 will connect you to a trained professional from the closest crisis counseling center within the network.

Clinical Trials

Clinical research is medical research that involves people like you. People volunteer to participate in carefully conducted investigations that ultimately uncover better ways to treat, prevent, diagnose, and understand human disease. Clinical research includes trials that test new treatments and therapies as well as long-term natural history studies, which provide valuable information about how disease and health progress.

Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) conduct a large number of research studies with patients and healthy volunteers. To find studies being conducted at the NIMH, visit [Join a Study: Adults](#). NIMH studies take place at the [NIH Clinical Center](#) in Bethesda, Maryland and require regular visits. If you don't live nearby but are interested in finding a clinical trial near you, visit www.clinicaltrials.gov.

Why do clinical trials need older participants?

It is important for clinical trials to have participants of different ages, sexes, races, and ethnicities. When research involves a group of people who are similar, the findings may not apply to or benefit everyone. When clinical trials include diverse participants, the study results may have a much wider applicability.

Researchers need the participation of older people in their clinical trials so that scientists can learn more about how the new drugs, therapies, medical devices, surgical procedures, or tests will work for older people. Many older people have special health needs that are different from those of younger people. For more information, check out the National Institute on Aging (NIA)'s [Clinical Trials and Older People](#) brochure.

Last Revised: October 2016

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