

Depression In The Elderly Can Be A Serious Health Issue

from the American Counseling Association

The signs of depression in an elderly person can be easy to miss. We may incorrectly assume that being depressed is just part of the aging process. But despite its often being ignored or overlooked, depression can be a very real problem for many elderly people. It's a serious health issue that needs to be treated when it happens at any age.

Admittedly, recognizing true depression in the elderly can be difficult. An older person can have numerous reasons for feeling sad – the recent loss of someone close, increased health problems, lessened social opportunities, financial worries and similar problems the elderly can face.

The key is recognizing the differences between simple sadness and actual depression. Sadness is just an emotional low point and it's usually short-lived. True depression is a life-altering problem. It can diminish every aspect of a person's life and helps cause the high rate of suicide among the elderly.

Real depression is an ongoing, persistent mood. It's not just having a sad day or two, but rather facing a continual emotional low that interferes with daily life activities and functions.

There are a number of signs to look for. They include withdrawing socially, losing interest in pleasurable activities and ignoring personal care and hygiene. A depressed person often has sleep problems, perhaps difficulty falling asleep or waking repeatedly, then suffering from daytime sleepiness.

Depression can also upset normal eating patterns. There may be a lack of interest in food and subsequent weight loss, or binge eating and sudden weight gain.

Depression can leave the person feeling discouraged, hopeless, and worthless. There may be little energy, no interest in things around him or her, or perhaps high levels of anxiety, feelings of guilt or constant irritability and demanding behavior.

If someone you care about (or you yourself) is displaying such symptoms over an extended period of time, clinical depression could be the cause and it requires action. Depression does not cure itself or just go away. And many elderly people have trouble asking for help, especially just because they feel "sad."

Be pro-active and seek help. While clinical depression is a serious problem, the good news is that once identified, there are a variety of effective treatments available. Consult with a professional counselor or other mental health professional to find out more about dealing with this issue.

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