

Your Emotional Health: Just the Facts

Did you know that depression is a medical condition that affects 19 million Americans each year? Experts estimate that fifteen out of every 100 adults will experience a depressive episode at some time after the age of 65. Depression takes a toll on all of us. It can cause great pain to millions of people. It can affect the lives of families and friends.

It should not go overlooked and untreated in older adults. Remember, you are not alone. Help is available for you.

What is Depression?

Everyone gets sad sometimes — it might be a brief blue or sad mood, stress, disappointment, or grief after losing a loved one. However, depression is different.

Depression is not just a case of feeling down and blue. People who are experiencing depression have symptoms over a longer period of time (two weeks or more), that interfere with their ability to function like they normally do.

Depression is a serious medical illness often caused by an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. Much like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, depression is a disease that requires treatment. If left untreated, depression can last months or, sometimes, years.

Good News . . . Did you know that with proper treatment, more than 80% of people with depression can improve?

Most people can be helped quickly and effectively. Symptoms can be relieved, usually in a matter of weeks.

- There are effective medications and counseling treatments (talk therapy) that often are used in combination
- Many people need therapy to deal with the emotional or interpersonal problems often associated with their illness
- Several types of medications are available, none of them habit-forming
- Ask your health care provider, social worker, or Jewish Family Services for help
- Turn to your family and friends for love, support, and guidance

Common Symptoms of Depression in Older Adults

- Feeling slowed down
- Persistent sadness (everyday, lasting all or nearly all day, for two or more weeks)
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Excessive worries about health and financial problems
- Change in weight
- Change in appetite
- Tearfulness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Pacing and fidgeting
- Difficulty concentrating
- Physical problems (e.g. pain)
- Thoughts of suicide or death

Does this sound like someone you know?

“My family and friends noticed that I just wasn’t myself anymore. I didn’t enjoy things like I used to. It became so difficult to concentrate on anything that I felt worthless. I didn’t want to talk to anyone. I felt like I was in a big hole that I couldn’t get out of.”

What Depression Is Not

In older adults, depression is often overlooked and left untreated. One reason for this is that there are people who incorrectly believe that depression is a normal part of aging. Second, depressive symptoms are so disabling that people cannot reach out for help. Third, depressive symptoms are often unrecognized.

As a result, some older adults unfortunately continue holding onto the mistaken belief that they have to “stay strong and tough it out”. Simply put, having symptoms of depression is not a sign of personal weakness. In fact, telling people that you are having symptoms of depression is a first step to getting help and getting better.



Depression is not a normal part of aging

What to Do If You or a Loved One is Depressed

- See your healthcare provider or contact your Jewish Family Services office
- Follow-up on all your appointments with your therapist
- Follow all directions about how and when you should take your antidepressant medication
- Contact your healthcare provider if you are experiencing side effects from your medication
- Take your medication as long as your healthcare provider tells you to, even if you are starting to feel better. Otherwise, your depressive symptoms may return. Remember, studies show that most antidepressant medications are not addictive
- Ask your healthcare provider about exercise
- Ask your healthcare provider about improving your diet
- Ask your healthcare provider about establishing a normal sleeping schedule
- Ask your healthcare provider about reducing caffeine and alcohol

Be sure to tell your healthcare provider or family services worker about:

- All the medications you are taking, including those you are taking over the counter (include herbal supplements, too)
- How you are feeling emotionally
- Whether you are feeling isolated, down, or depressed

Depressed persons may need help to get help

The very nature of depression can interfere with an individual’s ability or wish to get help. Therefore, it is important that:

- Encouragement be given from family and friends to seek treatment to ease the person’s pain and suffering
- Even more help can be provided to those who are depressed by taking them for assessment and treatment
- You do not ignore suicidal thoughts, words, or acts.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IMMEDIATELY!

Resources at a Glance

Daughters of Sarah Senior Community	(518) 456-7831
Jewish Family Services of NENY	(518) 482-8856
Robert & Dorothy Ludwig Schenectady JCC	(518) 377-8803
Sidney Albert Albany JCC	(518) 438-6651
United Jewish Federation of NENY	(518) 783-7800
National Mental Health Association	www.nmha.org
New York State Office for the Aging	(800) 342-9871
Family Caregiver Alliance	www.caregiver.org

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