

DEPRESSION IN THE ELDERLY

**David Lowenstein, Ph.D.
Psychologist**

- Everyone is sad sometimes, later in life the reasons for becoming depressed seem so obvious and so common that we are inclined to think that it is normal for older people to feel depressed
- The kinds of things that are associated with feeling depressed become more common with the elderly
 - ✓ Having to stop work
 - ✓ Less income
 - ✓ Onset of arthritis or other physical symptoms
 - ✓ Loss of a partner or someone close or loss of a dear pet
- Yet fewer than 1 elderly person in 6 experience symptoms of depression which are noticeable either to themselves or others
- Fewer than 1 in 30 are so depressed that they see a doctor and receive treatment for Depressive Illness

Symptoms:

1. Feeling of sadness, depression or being “down” which is more severe than normal sadness
2. A loss of interest in life and an inability to enjoy the things that usually give pleasure
3. A sense of fatigue or tiredness which is there even when you’re not doing much, so much so that even the simplest tasks feels like a major effort
4. Loss of appetite and often a loss of weight also
5. A inner feeling of restlessness, making it hard to rest or relax properly
6. A feeling of wanting to withdraw from people, or if people are around, snippiness or irritability
7. Difficulty sleeping, often wakening very early in the morning (at least an 1 or 2 earlier than usual) and being unable to get back to sleep again
8. A lack of confidence in yourself, often coupled with feelings of being useless or a burden to others

9. Feelings of being bad or guilty, perhaps magnifying incidents from the past and getting things out of proportion, or wondering if you are being punished by GOD
 10. Thoughts of suicide, most people with severe depression feel like ending it all sometimes and these feelings should be taken seriously
- The picture of depression in older people can be a little more difficult because the physical illness of depression also can resemble many other physical conditions
 - It is also characteristic of older people to complain less of being depressed and instead to express distress by becoming preoccupied with bodily symptoms
 - Older people also have the significant fear that they are becoming or may become senile and as a result may try and mask the signs of depression based on this fear

Getting Help: the dos' and don'ts'

1. DO ask for help – it is not normal to feel depressed just because you are getting older
2. DO try to get out accept the offer of neighbors and friends or family who want to take you out of the home for awhile, staying at home can aggravate joint problems because of your lack of movement
3. DO eat properly – people with depression often lose weight and have a poor diet and older bodies cannot compensate as well as younger ones when the wrong food are eaten
4. DO keep reminding yourself that you are not ILL, not letting yourself other others down and that the vast number of people do eventually feel better
5. DO tell someone if you are feeling so low that you feel like ending it all
6. DO accept professional help if it is suggested by the family doctor or family, etc.
7. DON'T keep your feelings to yourself, this encourages going over the same worries repeatedly and often pointlessly
8. DON'T resort to drinking alcohol to drown your sorrows, alcohol actually may worsen depression and it may react with the other medications you are taking

9. DON'T panic about not sleeping properly – worrying about sleeping is the best way to ensure that you won't
10. DON'T alter the number of tablets you are on, or stop taking them, or try other remedies
11. DON'T think that depression leads to senility or dementia, it doesn't