

Understand the Causes and Signs of Depression

Everyone gets “the blues” now and then. However, when there is little pleasure in social interactions, an overwhelming sense of sadness

A recent study suggests that exercise may be as effective as medication in the treatment of depression in seniors. or anxiety and these feelings linger for a prolonged period of time, there may be a more serious problem.

Doctors call this condition "clinical depression" and the elderly are especially vulnerable.

There are many causes of depression, from a single traumatic event to a prolonged illness, or death in the family. It may also be influenced by genetics or brain chemistry. Often people become depressed for no clear reason.

The good news is that depression can be overcome. Support groups can help people deal with major life changes that require new coping skills or social support. A doctor might suggest therapeutic counseling, joining a local senior center, volunteer service, or nutrition program. Antidepressant drugs can also help improve mood, sleep, appetite, and concentration.

Live Life

For many seniors, one of the biggest concerns is how to fill each day with meaningful pursuits. Some people seem to have more interests than time, while others wonder how they will ever find enough to do. One key to growing old gracefully and happily is to actually do the things we have been putting off. Dust off some of your old hobbies, travel or learn a new skill.

It has also been shown that seniors who remain socially active are healthier overall, whereas seniors who live alone and don't seek the company of friends and family tend to feel isolated and prone to depression.

A research study presented at the American Psychological Association's annual meeting has found that seniors who are comfortable with and use computers on a regular basis are much less likely to suffer from depression and its symptoms. Years ago there were few options for seniors living alone. Today there are many opportunities to forge bonds of common interest with others through senior centers, cultural clubs, or adult education courses right in your own community. The key is to reach out and take advantage of them.

Nurture your Spiritual Well Being

There is growing evidence that faith and spirituality are contributing factors in health and well being. Studies show that seniors who practice their faith on a regular basis are more at peace with their lives and are better able to accept loss and other stressful conditions associated with advancing age. They also tend to have a stronger connection to friends, family and their community. Clearly, for many seniors, faith is a source of fellowship, strength and comfort. As such, its potential contributions to healthy aging cannot be ignored.

Healthy Aging Resources

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

1-888-687-2277

www.aarp.org

American Federation for Aging Research

212-703-9977

www.infoaging.org

American Heart Association

1-800-242-8721

www.americanheart.org

eMaxHealth

www.emaxhealth.com

The Healthy Aging Campaign

610-793-0979

www.healthyaging.net

Medline Plus

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus

National Council on the Aging

202-479-1200

www.ncoa.org

National Institutes of Health

301-496-4000

www.nihseniorhealth.gov

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2202 North Kickapoo Street, Lincoln, IL 62656

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LIVING BETTER
LONGER

Helpful Hints for Healthy Aging



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Over 30 million Americans are now over 65 years of age. With advances in health care leading the way, that number is projected to almost triple in the next 50 years. The question that remains in many people's minds is: *Faced with longer life expectancies, how can we stay healthy and happy as we age?*

In fact, healthy aging involves both genetic and behavioral factors. Since inherited health issues may be beyond our control, the answer to healthy aging is far more likely to be found in the things you can control about your life, your environment and your lifestyle. Toward that end, this pamphlet offers a number of simple steps that you can take to help you or a loved one live longer, stay healthier and be more independent later in life.

Experts agree that factors that influence healthy aging are only 30 percent genetic, while 70 percent are behavioral.

Exercise and Nutrition

As we get older, common ailments like arthritis, muscle pain, fatigue and other physical impairments sometimes get in the way of maintaining a regular exercise program. Yet studies show that staying physically active and exercising regularly can actually help prevent, delay, or even reverse many diseases and disabilities associated with age. Even if compromised mobility keeps you from participating in vigorous physical activities, you can still derive important health benefits from a more limited exercise program targeted to your personal needs and capabilities. *Remember, always consult your physician before beginning any type of exercise program.*

Nutrition is another area that often tends to be neglected as we get older. With age our appetites and eating habits change. Some people also develop sensitive stomachs or have trouble chewing. Others find that "food just doesn't taste the same," or they simply don't enjoy eating alone.

Fortunately, you don't need to sacrifice flavor or good nutrition in order to eat food that agrees with you. Today there are many available food substitutes designed to accommodate every eating requirement. A professional nutritionist can design a plan tailored to virtually any need and preference.

If you have a tendency to skip meals because you live alone, try planning to eat at least one meal a day with a friend or relative. Cooking together can make meal preparation seem less of a chore, while eating together can perk up your appetite and make meal times more enjoyable. In fact, just a few simple changes in your food choices, preparation or eating habits can often make a big difference in your attitude about eating and your overall nutritional well being.



Dancing is great for helping people stay in shape. A 150-pound adult can burn about 150 calories doing 30 minutes of moderate social dancing.

Medication Matters

As we age, chances are we will require help from at least one or more prescription drugs to fight high cholesterol, lower our blood pressure, or keep our blood sugar under control. Many seniors also take over-the-counter medications to lose weight, boost energy, or fight aches and pains. What we often don't realize is that all these medications can sometimes interact in a dangerous, even lethal, way.

If you take any type of medication, it's important to familiarize yourself with all potential side effects and interactions. You should also advise your doctor and pharmacist of any health supplements or non-prescription preparations you may be taking. Medication can help prolong and improve our lives but awareness and proper medication management is essential to achieving optimum benefits and safety.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research offers an excellent publication on this subject. The booklet, entitled "*Drug Interaction: What You Should Know*," is available free of charge. Write the Federal Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009 and request Item #600G. A copy may also be printed directly from the FDA web site, www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/druginteractions.htm.

A 1997 study published in Archives of Internal Medicine found that 35 percent of ambulatory older adults have had an adverse event due to drug interaction and most of them required medical care as a result.



Keep Stress to a Minimum

Stress is a serious health threat for many seniors and is associated with the development of such conditions as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, arthritis, and certain types of cancer.

With issues like declining independence, financial concerns and the loss of friends and loved ones far more prevalent among older

adults, it's no surprise that seniors tend to have a greater likelihood for stress in their lives.

Often, simply sharing the burden of your concerns and feelings will help relieve stress.

When stress occurs, the most important step one can take is to acknowledge the problem and seek help, whether it's professional counseling, family support or physician-prescribed medical intervention.