

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Definition of Depression

Depression is a medical illness in which a person has feelings of sadness, discouragement, and lack of self-worth. Whereas grief over a loss is normal and may last for weeks or months, depression—a sense of losing all hope and joy in life—is not normal.

Possible Symptoms and Signs of Depression

Check the symptoms and signs that apply to your senior adult.

- Sadness
- Fatigue
- Abandoning or losing interest in hobbies or other fun activities
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Sleep disturbance (sleeping too much or too little)
- Increased anxiety or irritability
- Complaints of low motivation, lack of energy, physical problems
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Obsessive worrying
- Memory problems
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Fixation on death
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Giving things away
- Preoccupation with death

- Feeling suddenly happier, calmer
- Stockpiling pills or obtaining a weapon
- Comments such as: “I have nothing to live for,” “I don’t want to be a burden on my family,” and other statements of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness
- More frequent physical complaints (This can be the predominant symptom of depression in some while in others, the worsening of physical ailments is not mentally caused.)
- Low motivation
- Loss of self-worth
- Weight loss, loss of appetite, weight gain
- Deteriorating health

Facts About Depression in Senior Adults

1 As the population ages, it’s imperative that society and physicians become more sensitive to senior adult emotional health concerns. The National Institutes of Health reports that two million seniors over the age of 65 suffer from full-blown depression and another five million suffer from a lesser form of depression in the U.S.

2 Depression is common, yet most people don’t get the help they need—and this is especially true of the elderly. Doctors usually focus on the physical issues and not the mental ones.

3 Senior adults are less likely than the general population to mention to their doctors or families that they’re depressed or feeling down.

4 A study of out-patients showed that only nine percent of the doctors used routine questions or a screening tool for depression. Most often, doctors gave medication out for existing problems vs. for depression if the senior said they weren’t feeling well, were tired more than usual or not sleeping well. Doctors were less likely to discuss depression but were very receptive to patient requests for medications to deal with symptoms.

As an example, the following is a completed short form of the GDS, along with score interpretations.

		Geriatric Depression Scale Short Form	
YES	NO		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1.	Are you basically satisfied with your life?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2.	Have you dropped many of your activities and interests?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.	Do you feel your life is empty?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4.	Do you often get bored?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5.	Are you in good spirits most of the time?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6.	Are you afraid something bad is going to happen to you?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7.	Do you feel happy most of the time?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8.	Do you often feel helpless?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9.	Do you prefer to stay at home, rather than going out and doing new things?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10.	Do you feel you have more problems with memory than most?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11.	Do you think it is wonderful to be alive now?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12.	Do you feel pretty worthless the way you are now?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13.	Do you feel full of energy?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14.	Do you feel that your situation is hopeless?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15.	Do you think most people are better off than you?
		Count the NO answers and enter the total here: <input type="text"/>	