

Depression is not a normal part of aging

A friend of mine noticed how sad her aging aunt was a few years ago. I shared with her that depression in elderly people is sometimes different from depression in other age groups. The following tips were helpful to my friend's family as they looked for ways to help their loved one. Maybe this guide will be helpful for anyone considering depression in an older person.

Depression is **not** a normal characteristic of aging.

■ Depression in the elderly is just as treatable as it is in any other age group, which is to say, highly treatable. Doctors usually recommend a combination of counseling and antidepressant medicine.

■ If antidepressants are used, **specific antidepressants** which have had a greater success in general for the elderly may be used as opposed to others recommended for younger populations. A **lower dosage** may be prescribed also for this person. *This approach is because an elderly person may have multiple medical conditions, as well as, a slower metabolism rate.*

■ All of the typical symptoms of major depression can affect older people who are depressed. These include

- √ **lowered energy level,**
- √ **increased fatigue,**
- √ **loss or gain of weight,**
- √ **problems sleeping,** and
- √ **decreased ability to concentrate or make decisions.**

(Physicians along with mental health professionals can help determine whether these symptoms are explainable by a medical condition, including dementia. Of course dementia and depression can co-exist; in many such cases, the depression can still be treated.)

■ An important symptom of depression is **loss of interest or pleasure in activities formerly enjoyed.**

■ Some symptoms of depression are hard to detect in an elderly person. For instance, "**sad affect,**" the feeling of being sad most of the time, may not be obvious, because an elderly person's facial expressions and statements may not reflect it. The same is true of feelings of **worthlessness,** inappropriate **feelings of guilt,** or **recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.**

■ Older people are **less likely** than younger ones to express or share suicidal thoughts. This does not mean they are less likely to have them, though elderly people, as a group, are more at risk for suicide than many other groups.

Talk with them

■ If you feel an elderly person, you know might be depressed and suicidal, **don't avoid talking** about it with them.

■ As with any other age group, **bringing up the concepts of depression or suicide will not cause the person to become more depressed or suicidal.** In actuality, it is quite helpful for the depressed individual to express difficult feelings.



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For 24 hour help, call the San Luis Valley Mental Health Center's emergency services at 589-3671.

A national crisis number for suicide prevention is 1-800-784-2433.