

# MENTAL HEALTH MONTH 2015

## B4Stage4

## Depression in Older Adults

Have you ever suffered from extended periods of sadness, loss of pleasure in everyday activities, poor sleep, or feelings of worthlessness or guilt? Have you quickly lost or gained weight, or lost all energy to complete everyday tasks? If so, you may be experiencing symptoms of depression.

Contrary to stereotypes about aging, depression is not a “normal” part of getting older. It is a medical problem that affects many older adults and can often be successfully treated.

According to a recent study from the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*:

**27%**

of older adults assessed by aging service providers met the criteria for a diagnosis of major depression

**31%**

of older adults had symptoms of depression that didn't qualify as a diagnosable disorder, but significantly impacted their lives<sup>1</sup>

### Identifying Risk Factors for Depression

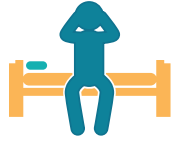
Depression is often under-recognized and under-treated in older adults. Without treatment, depression can impair an older adult's ability to function and enjoy life, and can contribute to poorer overall health. Compared to older adults without depression, those with depression often need greater assistance with self-care and daily living activities, and often recover more slowly from physical disorders. Use the checklist to determine if you or someone you know may be at risk for depression.

#### Check for Risk Factors

Depression in older adults may be linked to several important risk factors. These include, among others:

- Medical illness (particularly chronic health conditions associated with disability or decline)
- Overall feelings of poor health, disability, or chronic pain
- Progressive sensory loss (i.e. deteriorating eye sight or hearing loss)
- A history of falling repeatedly
- Sleep disturbances
- Mental impairment or dementia
- Medication side effects (in particular from benzodiazepines, narcotics, beta blockers, corticosteroids, and hormones)
- Alcohol or prescription medication misuse or abuse
- Prior depressive episode, or family history of depression
- Extended mourning due to death of a friend, family member, or other loss
- Any type of stressful life events (i.e. financial difficulties, new illness/disability, change in living situation, retirement or job loss, and interpersonal conflict)
- Dissatisfaction with one's social network

## Symptoms of Depression



Changes in energy level and sleep patterns



Difficulties with concentration or decision making



Feeling sad, empty, hopeless, worthless or extremely guilty



Loss of interest or pleasure in activities



Frequent thoughts of death or suicide, or an attempt of suicide



Noticeable restlessness or irritability



Changes in appetite, eating habits, or weight

## Screening For Depression

A quick, easy and confidential way to determine if you may be experiencing depression is to take a mental health screening. A screening is not a diagnosis, but a way of understanding if your symptoms are having enough of an impact that you should seek help from a doctor or other professional. Visit [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org) to take a depression screening. If you don't have internet access, you can ask your primary care doctor to do a screening at your next visit.

Depression is common and treatable, and the earlier it is identified and addressed, the easier it is to reverse the symptoms.

Get screened.



[www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)  
Anonymous • Free • Confidential

## Treatment Options

The most common and effective treatment for depression is a combination of therapy and medication, but some people may benefit from just one form of treatment.

If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of depression, you should seek professional help immediately. If you or someone you know is in crisis and would like to talk to a crisis counselor, call the free and confidential National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

## Medicare Helps Cover Mental Health Services

Worrying about health insurance costs should never be a barrier to treatment. Visit the Medicare QuickCheck® on [MyMedicareMatters.org/lp/mha](http://MyMedicareMatters.org/lp/mha) to learn more about all of the mental health services available to you through Medicare.

### Medicare Part A

Medicare Part A (hospital insurance) helps cover mental health care if you're a hospital inpatient. Part A covers your room, meals, nursing care, and other related services and supplies.

### Medicare Part B

Medicare Part B (medical insurance) helps cover mental health services that you would get from a doctor as well as services that you generally would get outside of a hospital, like visits with a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or clinical social worker, and lab tests ordered by your doctor. Part B may also pay for partial hospitalization services if you need intensive coordinated outpatient care.

### Medicare Part D

Medicare Part D (prescription drug coverage) helps cover drugs you may need to treat a mental health condition.

[www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may)



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National Council on Aging

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Administration on Aging/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2013). Older Americans behavioral health issue brief 6: Depression and anxiety: Screening and intervention. Retrieved April 2, 2015, from [http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/center-for-healthy-aging/content-library/IssueBrief\\_6\\_DepressionAnxiety\\_Color.pdf](http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/center-for-healthy-aging/content-library/IssueBrief_6_DepressionAnxiety_Color.pdf)  
<sup>2</sup> Medicare & Your Mental Health Benefits. (2014). Baltimore: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Retrieved April 2, 2015, from <http://www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/10184.pdf>