



# Senior Series

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and Ohio Aging Network professionals



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## Depression: More than Just the Blues

Everyone has experienced "the blues" sometime in his or her life. But when they will not go away and you do not enjoy things like you used to, you may be experiencing depression.

Depression is not a temporary feeling of sadness or being "down in the dumps." It is a persistent mood state that interferes with normal functioning in daily life. Depression is a medical illness and is not a sign of weakness. We cannot will or wish depression to go away.

There is no one cause of depression. Several factors contribute to depression, including biological, psychological, and genetic factors. Scientists are still studying what causes some people to become depressed. Depression can occur with other medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, or heart disease. Medications may also cause side effects that contribute to depression.

Depression is common among older adults, but it is *not* a normal part of aging. Life changes as we get older, such as a serious illness or the loss of a loved one, cause us to feel lonely and sad. While it is healthy to go through a time of adjustment after a change or major loss, many older adults may develop depression and never regain emotional balance.

There are different types of depression:

- In **major depression** or **clinical depression**, symptoms interfere with a person's ability to function normally. On-going symptoms affect their thoughts, behavior, and physical health. This may occur once in a person's lifetime, but it can recur again throughout the person's life.
- **Dysthymic disorder**, also called **dysthymia**, is not as severe as major depression but may last a long

time. Dysthymia lasts two years or longer. Although a person may be functioning, they experience chronic symptoms that affect their quality of life.

- People with **bipolar disorder** experience alternating mood swings of severe highs (mania) and lows (depression), along with mixed mood states.

Although depression affects more than 6.5 million adults over age 65, the symptoms of depression are often missed and go untreated. Symptoms of depression in older people may be social withdrawal, irritability, confusion, loss of appetite, or inability to sleep. Older people may not feel comfortable discussing feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or loss to their doctor so they talk about physical symptoms. Older women are more likely to experience depression since women in general become depressed more often than men.

Depression may not be preventable, but there are things that you can

do to lower your risk. Maintaining friendships can help ease the loneliness of losing a spouse or loved one.

Hobbies keep your mind active while exercise can lift your mood. Eating a balanced diet may help avoid illnesses that can trigger depression.

Depression must be diagnosed by a medical professional. If you think you may be depressed, it is important that you speak with your doctor. Ask a family member or a friend to help you make an appointment or go with you to the appointment. Treatment with medication and/or psychotherapy has been proven to be effective and can help you live a happy, more satisfying life.

## Sources

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