



# Aging Adults and Depression

What You Need to Know



Behavioral Healthcare Options, Inc.



## **Depression – More Than Just “The Blues”**

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You may not know exactly what's wrong with you, but you do know you just don't feel like your usual self. And, you're not enjoying the things that once gave you pleasure. Most everyone can say they've had a case of “the blues” at some point in life. It's normal for people to get sad every now and then, or to experience mood swings, and most people bounce back in a short time. However, when the sadness persists or keeps returning, when everyday things like going to work, being with friends, sleeping, or just enjoying life continue to be difficult, it isn't just “the blues” anymore. It may be clinical depression.



## **Depression is a Medical Illness**

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Depression is more than just feeling sad or “down in the dumps.” A person can't just “snap out of it.” Depression is a medical disorder just like arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease. It affects your body, mood, thoughts and behavior. Without treatment, depression can last for months or years and severely limit a person's function; however there are effective treatments.



## You are Not Alone

More people are affected by clinical depression than you may realize. In fact, the United States has the highest incidence of depressive disorders worldwide. Depression affects people of all races, ages, social, economic, and educational backgrounds. But women, teens and aging adults are at higher risk. At any point in time in the United States, as many as 8-10% of women and 3-5% of men are experiencing an episode of depression. You're definitely not alone.



## Depression is Not Your Fault

A lot of people feel ashamed and have a hard time accepting they have depression. But depression isn't something you bring on yourself. It doesn't mean you're weak or not trying hard enough to get better. It just means you need help to return to your "old self." Depression can even occur if your life is going well.





## Symptoms of Depression

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Symptoms may vary from person to person, but people with clinical depression will have at least some, or perhaps all of these symptoms. Check the ones that you have.

I feel sad, anxious or empty.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've lost interest in things that used to be important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I notice that I am losing/gaining weight.	<input type="checkbox"/>
My sleep is disturbed – too little, too much, or broken.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get tired for no reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel depressed even when good things happen.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel I am not useful or needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have difficulty concentrating and making decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
It takes a great effort to do simple things.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have negative thoughts much of the time.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm restless and irritable more than usual.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have felt so low that I've thought of suicide.	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have experienced five or more of these symptoms for longer than two weeks, or if you've experienced the last symptom, please contact your primary care physician or call Behavioral Healthcare Options (BHO) at **702-364-1484** or toll-free **1-800-873-2246**, TTY **711**.



## What Causes Depression?

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Depression is caused by a combination of biological, genetic, environmental, and psychological factors.

- **Genetics** – Depression tends to run in families, especially certain types of depression. Scientists are studying certain genes that may make some people more prone to depression.
- **Brain Chemistry** – People with depression may have different brain chemistry than those without the illness. Imbalances of certain chemicals in the brain (called neurotransmitters) are thought to lead to the symptoms. Evidence of depression appears on certain brain scans in the areas that control mood, thinking, sleep, appetite, and behavior.
- **Hormonal Changes** – These are more likely to affect women and play a role in postpartum depression.
- **Other Medical Illnesses** – Depression can also result from other medical problems, such as thyroid disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, heart disease or sleep apnea. It may also occur along with other psychiatric conditions, such as anxiety disorders.
- **Misuse of Alcohol and/or Other Drugs** – Use of alcohol or drug abuse can trigger depression.

■ **Use of Some Medicines** – Some medicines used to treat high blood pressure and other conditions can cause a low mood and fatigue – side effects similar to symptoms of depression.

■ **Severe Stress, Grief or Abuse** – Depression may develop as a result of trauma, loss of a loved one, a difficult relationship, or other emotionally stressful situations.

Regardless of the cause, the important thing to remember is that depression is a treatable medical illness, and not a sign of personal failings.



## **Early Treatment is Key**

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Many people with depression never seek treatment, and without treatment, depression can be very damaging. Experts agree that depression should be treated when it interferes with social and work activities, interpersonal relationships and day-to-day functioning. As with any other suspected illness, you should first consult a professional for a proper diagnosis.

The most common approaches for treating depression are psychotherapy (also called “talk therapy” or counseling), antidepressant medication, or a combination of the two. Treatment will depend on your diagnosis and severity of symptoms.



## Things to Try in Order to Help Yourself

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Depression can make you feel exhausted, hopeless, and helpless. It's important to realize that when you feel this way, it's not an accurate picture of reality. These negative thoughts will begin to decrease as your treatment begins to take effect. In the interim, here are some things you can do to help yourself feel better:

- Do things that make you feel good, such as gardening, quilting, or going to a movie.
- Get some exercise. Start small by walking around the block, or take a yoga class just once a week and build up your strength. Be with others and find someone to talk to. It's much better than being alone and feeling isolated.
- Because depression can rob us of our concentration and decision-making skills, even simple tasks can seem overwhelming. It's helpful to break large tasks into small ones. Work on it for 15-30 minutes at a time.
- Let your family and friends into your life.
- Expect that you'll feel better gradually, not immediately. Sometimes the first things that get better are your sleep and appetite – even before your depressed mood lifts.
- Try not to make any life-changing decisions (divorce, marriage, moving, etc.) while in the middle of a depressed state. If you must make important decisions, run them by someone you trust.

# How do I get help?

For more information about depression or to make an appointment please contact us at:

**702-364-1484** or toll-free  
**1-800-873-2246**, TTY **711**

Do you have questions for your doctor? Would you like to talk to your doctor about your questions? Write them down here. Please use additional paper if necessary.

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Take this brochure to your appointment.

Tiene derecho a recibir ayuda e información en su idioma sin costo. Para solicitar un intérprete, llame al número de teléfono gratuito para miembros que se encuentra en su tarjeta de identificación del plan o los documentos de su plan.



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