

# Exercise for Mental Health:

## Depression and the Older Adult

### Depression

#### What is it?

Everyone feels sad or “under the weather” at times. It is part of life. But if those feelings continue for a long time and you begin to lose all hope and joy, it is not normal. This is known as **DEPRESSION**.

A common idea is that depression comes with getting old; however this is not true. Learn to spot these signs and symptoms of depression and get help.

#### What causes it?

There is not just one cause for depression; however there are common factors that might cause it:

- Death in the family or serious illness
- Changes in the brain that affect mood
- Increased stress
- Genetics
- Feeling lonely, lack of family or friend support
- Some medications
- Fear of dying

- Serious illness

#### Most common signs of depression:

- An “empty” feeling, ongoing sadness, and anxiety
- Crying too often or too much
- Feeling guilty, helpless, worthless, or hopeless
- Thoughts of death or suicide or a suicide attempt

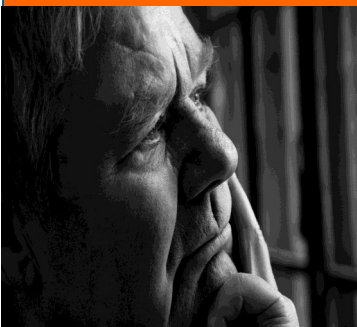


**It is important to remember that just because you don't feel sad it does not mean you don't have depression. Some other clues to look for are:**

\*Memory problems/  
hard time focusing  
\*Anxiety and  
worries  
\*Irritability  
\*Lack of interest in  
personal care (not  
showering, not  
eating, or forgetting  
medications)

\*Unexplained aches  
and pains, frequent  
headaches  
\*Persistent desire to  
be alone  
\*Being very tired,  
lack of energy  
\*Eating more or less  
than usual

\*Sleep problems,  
including trouble  
falling asleep, or  
sleeping too much  
\*Increased use of  
alcohol or other  
drugs



These may be signs of depression, a treatable illness. Please consult your doctor.

## How can EXERCISE help?

- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety
- Allows you to socialize with others
- Reduces risk for health conditions
- Prevents unhealthy weight gain
- Improves overall health

### Exercise recommendations from the American Heart Association:

- Moderately intense aerobic exercises such as walking or swimming for 30 minutes/day, or 20 minutes of vigorously intense exercises such as brisk walking and stair climbing, 5 days a week.
- 8-10 strength training exercises, 10-15 repetitions of each exercise twice a week.
- If you are at fall risk perform balance exercises
- 10 minutes of stretching exercises, with 30 second hold of stretch. Repeat each stretch 3 or 4 times.

**\*\*Always consult your health care provider before beginning a new exercise routine\*\***

FOR MORE  
INFORMATION :

National Institute of  
Mental Health

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

National Suicide Pre-  
vention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255 (toll-  
free/24 hours a day)

American Physical  
Therapy Association

Section on Geriatrics  
[www.geriatricspt.org](http://www.geriatricspt.org)

American Heart  
Association

[Americanheart.org](http://Americanheart.org)

### REFERENCES

1. Age Page: Depression. National Institute on Aging Web Site. 2008. <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/depression.htm>. Accessed. September 2, 2010.
2. Older adults: depression and suicide facts (fact sheet). National Institute of Mental Health Web Site. 2010. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/older-adults-depression-and-suicide-facts-fact-sheet/index.shtml>. Accessed September 2, 2010.
3. Nelson ME, Rejeski JW, Blair SN, Duncan PW, Judge JO, King AC, Macera CA, Castaneda-Sceppa C. Physical activity and public health in older adults: Recommendation from the American college of sports medicine and the American heart association. *Med Sci Sports Exerc.*2007;39(8):1435-1445.
4. Depression. Mayo Clinic Web Site. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/DS00175>. Accessed September 14,2010.

**\*\* All images taken from the 2007 version of Clip Art\*\***

**E**ngage in social activities. Don't become isolated; call your friends and family.

**eX**ercise to boost your mood and improve overall health.

**E**liminate substance abuse. Illicit drugs can worsen depressive symptoms.

**R**ead reputable self-help books.

**C**are for yourself. Proper nutrition and appropriate sleep are vital.

**I**nvolve yourself with your treatment plan. Don't miss an appointment or skip your medications.

**S**elf-Reflect: Pay attention to warning signs and triggers. Try meditation or journaling.

**E**liminate stress. Learn relaxation techniques; take a yoga or tai chi class.

The University of Texas at  
El Paso Physical Therapy  
Program.



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