

# Depression in Older Adults

---



Nearly 2 million older Americans have some type of depression. Sadly, some of them even take their own lives. Yet depression among older adults is often ignored. Learn the warning signs. You may help spare a loved one needless pain. You may also save a life.

## **What is depression?**

Depression is a serious illness that affects the way you think and feel. It is not a normal part of aging, or something you can snap out of. Most people with depression need help to get better.

## **Symptoms of depression can be:**

- Feeling very sad
- Being tired or listless
- Feeling like nothing makes you happy
- Sleeping more or less than normal
- Eating more or less than normal
- Having headaches, stomachaches, or other pains that don't go away
- Feeling nervous, "empty," or worthless
- Crying a lot
- Thinking or talking about suicide or death
- Feeling confused or forgetful

## What causes it?

We don't fully know. We think it is a mix of things. Some chemicals in the brain play a role. Depression does run in families. Older adults often face many stressors, such as death of friends or a spouse, health problems, and financial concerns. Sometimes, older adults have other chronic illnesses such as diabetes (high blood sugar), heart disease, or cancer that can cause symptoms of depression. Medicine side effects can also add to certain behaviors and feelings.

## How you can help

Show older friends and family love and support. If they seem depressed, encourage them to talk to their doctor or social worker.

### Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
(24 hour crisis hotline)  
800-273-TALK (8255)

National Institute of Mental Health  
866-615-6464 [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

National Alliance on Mental Illness  
800-950-6264 [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

Mental Health America  
800-969-6642 [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

National Suicide Hotline  
800-784-2433 (800-SUICIDE)



Adapted from KRAMES