
DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

Seniors Often Need Their Family Members To Help Them

Estimates of major depression among the elderly ranges from 1% - 6% of the population. For those with health problems who are receiving care in the hospital or at home, the numbers jump above 11%.

Is your elderly loved one depressed? Look for warning signs. They may no longer have fun doing things they have always enjoyed. They may often feel sad. Maybe they have started to have trouble sleeping or eating. Fatigue, the loss of energy, restlessness and an inability to concentrate are commonly signs of clinical depression.

As the loved one of someone suffering from depression, the first thing you must realize is that depression is not a weakness. It is an illness. As such, simply encouraging someone to snap out of it will be of little help. There are many things that you can do to provide a measure of relief, but truly effective treatment usually requires professional help.



Activities can provide enjoyable exercise, burn off stress, add to one's sense of accomplishment and lead to more social contacts.

DIAGNOSIS TO HEALING

The first step to recovery from depression is an accurate diagnosis, preferably by a mental health professional. However, since many of the senior generation may feel stigmatized by the need for a psychological visit/treatment, they may offer resistance. If you face such a situation, you may want to ask the primary care physician for help. Many seniors often feel much more comfortable confiding in their personal doctor.

Recovery plans often include medications, counseling and positive activity. Remember that depression inhibits the ability to self-motivate, so telling a depressed individual to do things is usually ineffective. Joining in and doing things with them is much more effective, and can provide the powerful medicine of love, as well.

Also, healing takes time. So it is easy to become frustrated. However, if you stick with it and follow the guidance of healthcare professionals, you can truly contribute to your loved one's recovery, happiness and quality of daily life.

FAMILY PARTICIPATION

Here are some things family members can do to create a healing environment for loved ones.

- ◆ Encourage activities. Focus on things they enjoyed prior to the onset of depression. Help them to be social - do volunteer work, join clubs, visit the local senior center, etc.
- ◆ Good feelings come from good times. Talk, laugh, joke and play. Also, it is important to talk about feelings - good and bad.
- ◆ Exercise. Take walks together, garden, go Wii bowling, clean, play horse shoes, etc.
- ◆ Make sure they eat regular meals.
- ◆ Make sure they stay well groomed. Looking good usually helps a person to feel better.
- ◆ Keep alcohol (a depressant) out of reach.
- ◆ Remind them of all the good things in life; home, health, family, friends, children and grandchildren. Let them know how very important they are to you and others.



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