

## Depression: Not a Normal Part of Aging

Depression is a serious disorder that can occur at any age, but when it happens to older adults it can often go unrecognized and untreated. That's because symptoms of depression in older adults often coincide with major life events that can cause feelings of sadness, such as retirement or the death of a loved one. And friends and family members may be fast to dismiss depression as a normal part of aging.

Another reason depression is harder to diagnose is because its symptoms — fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, memory problems — can mirror dementia and other illnesses common in older adults. Thus, the life events and illnesses associated with old age, and not depression, may be blamed for an older adult's symptoms. So how can you tell whether it's depression or something else?

### Know the Warning Signs

Here are some symptoms you should never dismiss as a normal part of aging, especially if they occur for more than a few weeks at a time.

- Loss of interest in things the person once enjoyed doing or an inability to find pleasure in any activities.
- Complaints of persistent aches and pains, chronic fatigue or decreased energy that can't be explained by a medical condition.
- Talk of suicide or expressing feelings of being a burden to loved ones (e.g., "I have nothing to live for.") These feelings may also coincide with a preoccupation with death.
- Overeating, loss of appetite or refusing to take prescribed medications or vitamins.
- Forgetfulness or an inability to concentrate on things or make decisions (if dementia has been ruled out).
- Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much.
- Irritability, anxiety and excessive worrying.

Depression can cause a number of different symptoms, and can complicate chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes. However, while aging is an inevitable part of life, depression need not be. If you're concerned about yourself or a loved one who may be dealing with depression, know that help is available. Take the first step and schedule an appointment with a health care provider at Cumberland Healthcare by call (715) 822-7500.

### Callout box:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 7 million of the nation's 39 million adults ages 65 years and older are affected by depression, yet it is often not recognized or treated.\*

\* [http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/cib\\_mental\\_health.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/cib_mental_health.pdf)