

MANAGING COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN OLDER ADULTS

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,
AND CAREGIVERS



READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- What the Most Common Mental Health Conditions Are.
- How to Prevent Common Mental Health Conditions.
- How to Manage Common Mental Health Conditions.



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WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?

Mental illness refers to a group of conditions, such as depression and anxiety, that affect our thoughts, emotions, behaviours and experiences. It is a condition that is caused by a variety of factors, such as genetics, personality, stress and brain chemistry. The symptoms include loss of motivation and energy, changed sleep patterns, persistent changes in mood, disturbances in thought or perception, or overwhelming obsessions or fears. It can interfere with a person's relationships or ability to complete their daily tasks.

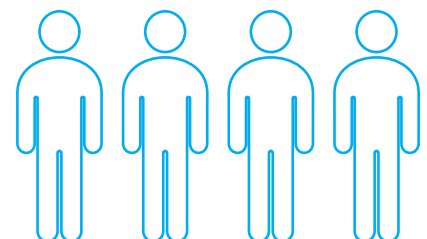


HOW CAN WE HELP PREVENT MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG OLDER ADULTS?

While most mental illnesses have their onset in childhood or adolescence, older adults are uniquely vulnerable to suffering from negative outcomes associated with mental illness. They are more likely to experience major life changes, such as deterioration in physical health moving into a long-term care or nursing home, or losing a loved one, and are less likely to be connected to others in the community. In fact, it is estimated that 19% to 24% of older Canadians are experiencing some degree of social isolation which can put them at increased risk of loneliness and mental health issues.



Over 19% of older Canadians are experiencing some degree of social isolation





Remain socially connected and active in the community



Engage in meaningful activities



Manage your chronic health conditions



Remain physically active



Maintain a healthy diet



Keep a regular sleep schedule

If you are facing mental health issues, you should reach out to your primary care provider or a mental health professional for assistance.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS AMONG OLDER ADULTS?

Older adults are at risk for a variety of mental health conditions. However, some are more common among older adults than others. Common mental health conditions among older adults that are highlighted in this pamphlet are:



1. Depression



2. Anxiety



3. Delirium



4. Addictive Disorders



5. Suicide

1. DEPRESSION



WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is more than feeling sad. It is a serious medical illness that causes persistently low mood and loss of interest in activities that were previously enjoyed, leading to emotional and physical problems that decrease a person's ability to function in their social and occupational life. While it can share many symptoms with sadness, depression is not something that people can get over on their own without treatment.

Depression can affect a person's mood, behaviour and physical functioning. Some common symptoms of depression are:

- Feeling sad, lonely or anxious
- Feelings of guilt or regret
- Loss of pleasure from favourite things or activities
- Sleeping problems
- Difficulty thinking or focusing
- Reduced energy and feeling tired more often
- Changes in eating habits or weight
- Feeling like a burden
- Loss of meaning in life
- Frequent complaints of pain and medical visits

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE DEPRESSION?

If you experience these symptoms for more than two weeks, you may have depression. This mood can result in behavioural changes, such as talking and moving slowly, withdrawal from people, giving up on hobbies, decreased self-care, or psychological changes, such as feeling hopeless and having negative thoughts.

Discussing your thoughts and feelings with your primary care provider can help them to understand what is happening in your life. They may do some tests to rule out other causes of the symptoms.

WHO IS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION?

Depression can affect anyone at any time. Older adults are particularly at risk because of physical and lifestyle changes that can cause some to feel anxious and a lost sense of independence. Some common risk factors for depression among older adults are:

- Are female
- Have pain
- Are widowed or divorced
- Have had previous depression
- Have experienced brain changes due to vascular problems
- Have a major physical and chronic disabling illness
- Are taking more than five medications
- Have excessive alcohol use
- Are socially disadvantaged and have low social supports
- Have experienced recent bereavement



- Are moving from home to another place, such as a retirement home or long-term care home
- Have experienced adverse life events
- Have chronic stress caused by health, family or marital problems
- Are experiencing social isolation and loneliness
- Have persistent sleep difficulties



HOW DO YOU MANAGE DEPRESSION?

Depression requires ongoing management. It does not typically improve without support from a medical professional. Your primary care provider can run tests to rule out contributing medical causes, and may recommend treatment with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination. They may also help you seek the advice of a psychiatrist or other mental health professional.



Coping with depression is very difficult. In addition to medical treatment, you will benefit from breaking the stigma and seeking support from family and friends.

2. ANXIETY



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

As we age, we often go through many life changes in a relatively short period of time. It's normal to feel anxious in these situations, but if your anxiety and fears are affecting your day-to-day life significantly, you may have anxiety and may benefit from the support of a mental health professional.



GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

This is the most common type of anxiety disorder for older adults. It causes people to worry excessively about everyday situations and events. The condition usually lasts at least six months and can cause restlessness, fatigue, muscle tension and insomnia or trouble sleeping.



PHOBIAS

Fear is a normal emotion, but when it interferes with leading our everyday lives, it can become a phobia and considered a condition. There are many different types of phobias, including social phobia, which causes people to fear social situations, as well as more specific phobias such as fear of flying, bugs and leaving the house. The most common phobia in older adults is the fear of falling.

WHO IS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE ANXIETY?

You are at increased risk of developing an anxiety disorder if you:

- Are female
- Lack social supports
- Have had a previous diagnosis of anxiety
- Have a medical or psychiatric condition
- Have poor health
- Have suffered a recent trauma



WHAT CAN ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

A person with anxiety may show some of the following symptoms:

- Irritability
- Fatigue
- Poor sleep
- Preoccupation with health problems
- Excessive worrying
- Seeking reassurance repeatedly
- Low self-confidence and avoidance of situations
- Intense states of fear and panic
- On edge or unsettles easily
- Headaches, upset stomach, insomnia, palpitations and chest pain, sweating



HOW DO YOU MANAGE ANXIETY?

If you believe that you or a loved one has anxiety, the first thing you should do is talk to your primary care provider who can run tests to rule out contributing medical causes, and recommend treatment. Treatment can include talk therapy, stress reduction, coping skills, family and social support, as well as medication.



Aside from medication, changing certain behaviours can help you to manage the symptoms of anxiety: cutting down on caffeine, smoking, over-eating, alcohol and news intake, as well as getting regular exercise.



It can also be helpful to discuss your fears with friends and family members. Discuss what you're worried about and set specific goals to help you manage the symptoms of anxiety.

You can learn skills such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, and setting aside worry time.

3. DELIRIUM



WHAT IS DELIRIUM?

Delirium is a sudden and temporary disturbance in the brain leading to fluctuating problems with attention and alertness, thinking, and behaviour. It is caused by medical conditions and drugs that affect the brain.

The following factors can contribute to delirium:

- Infections
- Medication side effects
- Dehydration or malnutrition and changes in salt and water balance in the body
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Heavy alcohol or tobacco use or withdrawal
- Poor fitting hearing aids or glasses
- Being in a new or unfamiliar environment



WHO IS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE DELIRIUM?

People are more likely to suffer from delirium if they have:

- Dementia
- Depression
- Had recent heart, hip or other major surgery
- Had previous episodes of delirium
- Poor vision or problems hearing
- Or are 65 years or older



WHAT CAN DELIRIUM LOOK LIKE?

There are three types of delirium: hyperactive, hypoactive and mixed. A person with hypoactive delirium may show some of the following symptoms:

- Moves very slowly or is not very active.
- Does not want to spend time with others.
- Pauses when speaking or does not speak at all.
- Looks sleepy.



A person with hyperactive delirium may show some of the following symptoms:

- Is worried or afraid.
- Is restless.
- Repeats the same movements many times.
- Experiences hallucinations.
- Experiences delusions.



With a mixed delirium, a person can have symptoms of both hyperactive and hypoactive delirium during the same overall episode.

HOW CAN YOU MANAGE DELIRIUM?

Delirium is a sign that the body and brain are sick. If delirium is suspected, immediate medical attention is recommended.



- Delirium is treated by treating the underlying cause and managing the symptoms with or without the use of additional medications.
- In most people, delirium can clear in a few days or weeks and in others it may take longer, sometimes months.
- It is easier and quicker to treat delirium when the signs and symptoms are recognized early, but remember that everyone is different.

4. ADDICTIVE DISORDERS

WHAT ARE ADDICTIVE DISORDERS?

Addictive disorders can lead to problematic patterns of substance use or behaviours, such as the excessive use of alcohol or drugs, and gambling that interfere with a person's life. If an individual engages compulsively with a substance or behaviour, despite negative consequences, they may have an addictive disorder.

WHAT CAN AN ADDICTIVE DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

There are physical, psychiatric, social and cognitive signs that an older adult may be misusing substances. These include:



PSYCHIATRIC

- Sleep disturbances
- Mood swings
- Persistent irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression



PHYSICAL

- Tremors
- Poor coordination
- Unexplained injuries or bruising
- Malnutrition
- Poor hygiene and self-neglect
- Dependence



COGNITIVE

- Confusion and disorientation
- Memory impairment
- Daytime drowsiness



SOCIAL/BEHAVIOURAL

- Withdrawal from usual activities
- Family difficulties
- Early requests for medication renewals

WHAT ADDICTIONS ISSUES DO OLDER ADULTS COMMONLY FACE?

Older adults most often face addiction issues related to their use of alcohol, smoking, and prescription medications. Alcohol use is the most common issue among older adults, and 9% of those aged 65 and over smoke tobacco. However, women typically misuse prescription medications, and men typically misuse alcohol.



HOW ARE ADDICTIVE DISORDERS TREATED?

There is no one-size-fits-all treatment for addictive disorders. However, counselling in individual, group or family settings can help individuals manage their addiction. Counselling typically focuses on using a harm reduction approach, which emphasises reducing risks and harms associated with substance use over reducing substance use itself. Telling someone who has substance use issues to stop using is usually not an effective approach.



If you are taking care of someone who may be struggling with addiction, you can take a harm reduction approach to ensure they are as safe as possible. This can include:



- Ensuring their basic needs, such as food and shelter, are met.
- Helping them learn safer ways to use the substance.
- Focusing on what would make life better for your friend or family member, based on what their own goals are.
- Respecting the autonomy and choices of the older adult who is capable to make their own decisions.

5. SUICIDE



WHAT IS SUICIDE?

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Suicide can happen to anyone. Suicidal behaviour can be impulsive or planned.

WHY DO PEOPLE DIE BY SUICIDE?

People turn to suicide when they have lost hope or feel helpless. They often see no other way to relieve their pain. This is more likely to happen when one has depression, when one is in crisis or facing major life stressors, when one lost a sense of purpose or meaning in life, or when one feels disconnected from others.

WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS THAT SOMEONE MAY CONSIDER SUICIDE?

Before someone turns to suicide, they usually show warning signs. People who are feeling suicidal may:



- Show signs of agitation, high anxiety, anger, or paranoid behaviour
- Show a sudden change in mood or behaviour
- Show a sense of hopelessness and helplessness
- Express the wish to die or end their life
- Increase substance use
- Withdraw from engaging with people and activities that they previously enjoyed

- Experience changes in sleeping patterns
- Have a decreased appetite
- Give away prized possessions or make preparations for their death

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF SOMEONE SHOWS WARNING SIGNS FOR SUICIDE?

Asking about suicidal thoughts will not cause someone to have thoughts of suicide, or cause them to attempt suicide. Listen to and validate their pain, and offer your support.



If someone you know is showing signs that they may be thinking of suicide, you should take them to the nearest hospital emergency department.

If the person will not go to the hospital, or if you are not sure if this is the right thing to do, get help from a health care provider as quickly as possible.

If your loved one is attempting or about to attempt suicide, and you are not at risk, do not leave them alone and call 911.

HOW CAN YOU HELP PREVENT SUICIDE IN OLDER ADULTS?

Ensuring that the physical and mental health of older adults are well cared for and supported can be a powerful protective factor against suicide. Additionally, ensuring they remain socially connected and are prepared to cope with and adapt to changes can help prevent suicide among older adults.



If you or someone you know is experiencing depression or other mental health issues, seek treatment as well as programs that teach coping skills for stressors and for overwhelming emotions.



WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

CANADIAN COALITION FOR SENIORS' MENTAL HEALTH

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health shares information, resources and links to other organizations to promote mental health among older adults.



ccsmh.ca

CONNEX ONTARIO

ConnexOntario provides free and confidential health services information for people experiencing problems with alcohol and drugs, mental illness and/or gambling.



www.connexontario.ca



1-866-531-2600

TORONTO SENIORS HELPLINE

The Toronto Seniors Helpline offers supportive counselling over the phone, risk assessments, crisis de-escalation and triage to mobile crisis teams including Crisis



416-217-2077

1-877-621-2077

THE CENTRE FOR ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health provides services and education to support individuals with mental health and addiction challenges.



www.camh.ca



1-800-463-2338

GERSTEIN CRISIS CENTRE

The Gerstein Crisis Centre offers a crisis hotline that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to support individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.



www.gersteincentre.org



416-929-5200

RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Depression

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Advance Care Planning: How to Approach the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Managing Memory Problems
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Living Longer, Living Well – Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer’s Disease & Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.

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