



OLDER ADULT TYPICAL OR TROUBLED?

Being healthy and happy as we age is something that everyone deserves and can achieve. Discover new and healthy pathways to maintain and renew your body, mind and spirit. As we age, illness and trauma can manifest itself in many ways – mentally and physically. Feeling depressed or anxious is not normal for adults 65 and older. Our society has the mistaken belief that with age and the onset of other medical difficulties – sadness and nervousness are normal responses. Even something as serious as delusions or hallucinations can be caused by something as simple as a urinary tract infection. As we age everything we do has a greater impact on how we feel -- our nutrition, physical activity, ability to relax, how we think about situation, medications we take, and alcohol we may drink.

Characteristics of Good Mental Health

Mental wellness is happiness, peace of mind, enjoyment and satisfaction in life. It involves your needs, ambition, abilities, ideals, feelings and conscience in order to meet the demands of every day life.

- **Feel good about yourself.**
 - You are not overwhelmed by your own emotions. You can take life's disappointments in stride. You are tolerant, take pleasure in simple, everyday things and have an easy-going attitude toward yourself and others. You can respect and laugh at yourself, accept your shortcomings. You truly love yourself and forgive yourself.
- **Feel comfortable with other people.**
 - You are able to give love and to consider the interests of others. You have satisfying and lasting personal relationships. You like and trust others and believe that others will like and trust you. You are able to embrace other people's uniqueness. You do not take advantage of others, nor do you allow others to take advantage you. You feel that you belong.
- **Able to meet the demands of life.**
 - You accept your responsibilities and take care of problems as they arise. You shape your environment whenever possible and adjust to it whenever necessary. You plan ahead and do not fear the future. You welcome new experiences and ideas. You make use of their talents and set realistic goals. You are able to make your own decisions and are satisfied with putting your best effort into what you do.
- **Think about your mental health and know that you have the power to change it.**
 - Realize that your mental health is not something that is given to you at birth; it has developed and changed with you. You know that one of the most important steps you can take in life is accepting responsibility for your life; for your successes, your failures, and your happiness.
- **Recognizing when you need help.**
 - You keep telling yourself that it takes courage and strength to ask for help.



Signs of Trouble

Changes in any person's usual behavior or routine regardless of age can indicate a change in health and mental well-being. Some changes come on slow and aren't always recognized while other behavioral changes are quite sudden and obvious. Either way, these changes should not be ignored or just accepted because you are older. Symptoms of clinical depression can be triggered by other chronic illnesses common in later life, such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, heart disease, cancer and arthritis.

- Any sudden onset confusion or change in behavior
- Memory trouble after having a drink or taking a medication
- Loss of coordination (walking unsteadily, frequent falls)
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Unexplained bruises
- Being unsure of yourself
- Irritability, sadness, depression
- Unexplained chronic pain
- Changes in eating habits
- Wanting to stay alone much of the time
- Failing to bathe or keep clean
- Having trouble concentrating
- Difficulty staying in touch with family or friends
- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Anger, guilt, despair
- Very intense longing and sorrow
- Consideration should be given to your use of drugs and/or alcohol if you are experiencing memory loss, depression, repetitive falls and injuries, legal problems, chronic diarrhea, moods swings, weight loss and or isolation.

A Little about Grief

As we age the repetitiveness of loss of friends and loved ones may become overwhelming. It is extremely important to have strong positive beliefs about the meaning of dead, i.e., it being part of the life cycle, etc. It is easy to get lost in negative thoughts and loneliness.

One-third of widows/widowers meet criteria for depression in the first month after the death of their spouse. No two people will experience a loss in exactly the same way. Your grief will be as individual as your fingerprint. No one can tell you how to grieve. There are no formulas for how much a loss will hurt or how long grief will last, so do not compare yourself to others in similar situations. Grief produces individual physical and emotional responses.

Over time your symptoms and difficulties should begin to decrease, as you refocus attention on your daily activities. You should progressively feel better over time, i.e., 3 months, 6 months, 9 months, and a year.

An indication of trouble is prolonged grief accompanied by the symptoms listed above. It is important to find healthcare providers that specialize in or are at least knowledgeable about aging issues related to your health.

You can feel better and recover. We ask that you learn more about support groups, counseling, medications, changing to positive thought patterns, and enhancing your coping skills. Healthy lifestyles are also important. They include exercise, stress management, a balanced diet, faith and hope. For information, screening, and resources please refer to www.guidetofeelingbetter.org or call your local Mental Health America.