

Depression in elders is a widespread problem, but is not often recognized or treated, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Life changes can increase the risk for depression or make existing depression worse. According to the NIH, some of these life events are:

- Adapting to a move from home to an apartment or retirement facility
- Chronic pain, multiple illnesses or declining health
- Caring for a spouse or family member
- Feelings of isolation or loneliness as children move away and loved ones die
- Loss of independence (problems getting around, caring for themselves, or driving)
- Struggles with memory loss and problems thinking clearly
- Reduced sense of purpose. Retirement can bring with it a loss of identity, status, self-confidence, and financial security and increase the risk of depression. Physical limitations on activities you used to enjoy can also impact your sense of purpose.



Recognizing depression in elders starts with knowing the signs and symptoms. Some of the signs of depression in elders are:

- Sadness, feelings of despair, hopelessness or helplessness.
- Unexplained or aggravated aches and pains.
- Lack of motivation and energy.
- Slowed movement or speech.
- Being more confused or forgetful.
- Eating less. The refrigerator may be empty or contain spoiled food.
- Not bathing or shaving as often. Visitors may notice smells of urine or stool. Clothes may be dirty and wrinkled.
- Not taking care of the home.
- Stopping medicines or not taking them correctly.
- Withdrawing from others. Not talking as much, and not answering the phone or returning phone calls, loss of interest in socializing or hobbies.
- Sleep disturbances (difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, oversleeping, or daytime sleepiness).
- Loss of self-worth (worries about being a burden, feelings of worthlessness or self-loathing).
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Fixation on death; thoughts of suicide.