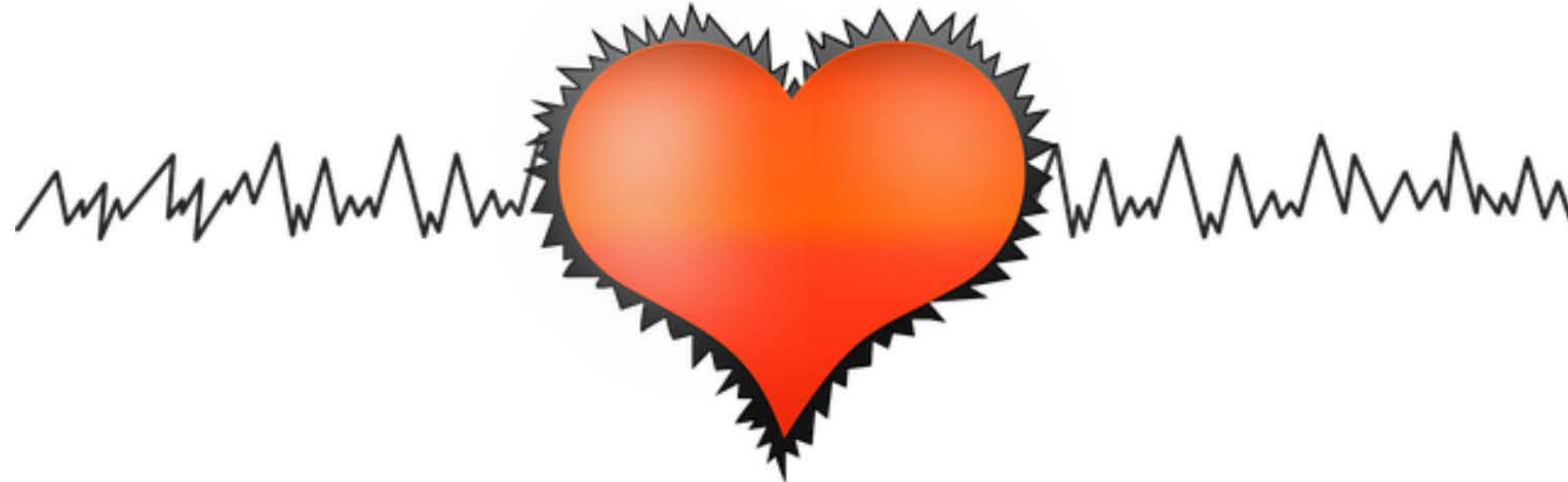


Treatment

If you think that you or a loved one may have depression, it is important to seek treatment. A person with depression cannot simply “snap out of it” — it is a medical condition that affects your quality of life. Depression can also lead to suicide, particularly if left untreated, and you are more likely to develop a physical illness if you have depression.

The good news is that, in most cases, depression is treatable in elders. The right treatment may help improve your overall health and quality of life.



First Step

If you think you have depression, the first step is to talk to your doctor or health care provider. Your doctor will review your medical history and do a physical exam to rule out other conditions that may be causing or contributing to your depression symptoms. They may also ask you a series of questions about how you’re feeling. It is important to be open and honest about your symptoms, even if you feel embarrassed or shy.

If other factors can be ruled out, the doctor may refer you to a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, counselor, social worker, or psychiatrist.

Options

- Medications called antidepressants can work well to treat depression. While some symptoms usually begin to improve within a week or two, they can take several weeks to work fully. As with most medications, some people experience some side effects, which in most cases can be managed or minimized. People over 65 must be careful when taking medications, especially when they’re taking medications for different conditions. Elders have a higher risk for experiencing bad drug interactions, missing doses, or overdosing. Be sure to tell every doctor you see about all the medications you are being prescribed.
- Psychotherapy (or “talk therapy”) can also be an effective treatment for depression. It helps by teaching new ways of thinking and behaving, and changing habits that may contribute to the depression. Psychotherapy can help you understand and work through difficult relationships or situations that may be causing your depression or making it worse. Research shows that cognitive-behavioral therapy, including a version called problem-solving therapy, may be an especially useful type of psychotherapy for treating elders and improving their quality of life.
- Support groups for depression, illness, or bereavement can connect you with others who are going through the same challenges. They are a safe place to share experiences, advice, and encouragement.
- Call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) to be connected to a trained counselor at a suicide crisis center nearest you.