



- Some estimates of major depression in older people living in the community range from less than 1% to about 5% but rise to 11.5% in older hospitalized patients. It is important for hospital staff to know about and be looking for signs of depression in older adults.
- Most older adults see an improvement in their symptoms when treated with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both.

Everyone feels down from time to time. However, with depression, these feelings are more severe and occur nearly every day for two weeks or more.



Assessment

Assessment of depressive symptoms can be captured through the use of **SIGECAPS** mnemonic:

- S** – sleep disturbance (insomnia, hypersomnia)
- I** – interest reduced (reduced pleasure or enjoyment)
- G** – guilt and self-blame
- E** – energy loss and fatigue
- C** – concentration problems
- A** – appetite changes (low appetite/weight loss or increased appetite/weight gain)
- P** – psychomotor changes (retardation, agitation)
- S** – suicidal thoughts

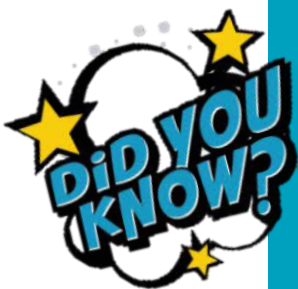
Symptoms

Depression in older patients can be difficult to diagnose, as signs and symptoms differ from those in younger adults and may not reflect diagnostic criteria.

- may not show or express sadness
- may be chronically irritable
- lose their ability to respond to positive external events
- somatic complaints
- hypochondriasis
- anorexia and weight loss
- anxiety disorder
- fatigue or sleep disturbances
- problems concentrating or remembering
- withdrawal from normal activities
- guilt
- suicidal ideation
- feeling helpless
- feeling hopeless

Treatment

- Only 10% of older adults receive treatment for depression
- Treatment includes addressing co-morbid conditions, implementing personalized pharmacologic therapy, consideration of psychotherapy, and close follow up.
- Antidepressant medication often takes 6 to 8 weeks to improve symptoms – if no benefit is seen, increase the dose as tolerated and/or try alternate medications
- Once improvement occurs, treatment should continue for at least 6 months



Dementia can cause some of the same symptoms as depression, and depression can be an early warning sign of possible dementia.

Depression can be common among older adults, but clinical depression is not a normal part of aging. Studies show that most older adults feel satisfied with their lives, despite having more illnesses or physical problems than younger people.