

MENTAL HEALTH



While we conscientiously treat our loved one's physical health, it's easy to overlook mental health as a component of aging. Challenges with our loved one's state of mind should be approached with the same sensitivity as physical ailments.

An estimated **20 percent** of people aged 55 and older experience some level of mental health challenge.



These concerns include anxiety, depression, dementia, and suicidal thoughts. **Yet less than 3 percent of older adults report seeking mental health solutions.**

Anxiety

Anxiety comes in several forms and can be closely tied to medications, depression, or other health issues.



Panic Disorder includes panic attacks and feelings of intense terror that strike repeatedly and without warning, sometimes without a specific trigger.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is characterized by obsessions that include rituals like hand washing, counting unnecessarily, cleaning, or other routines that serve to calm them.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder often includes nightmares, flashbacks, numbing of emotions, being easily startled, or irritability. Usually, it is in response a traumatic event in their past.

Phobia is an extreme fear to something that doesn't actually pose an immediate danger. Common phobias can be going outside, using the phone, certain animals, riding in a car, heights, tunnels, and flying.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is characterized by an ongoing feeling of worry about everyday life and activities.

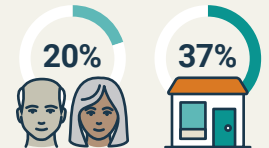
If you see any of these symptoms of anxiety in your loved one, seek reliable medical assistance. Their family doctor may be able to determine if the symptoms are linked to a medication or medical diagnosis. A trained mental health professional can determine the appropriate way to lead them through.

Source: [Mental Health America](#)



Depression and Suicide

Up to **20 percent** of older adults and up to **37 percent** of nursing home residents suffer from depression.



13% Although older Americans make up **13 percent** of the population, they account for **20 percent** of the people who commit suicide.

Seventy-five percent of older adults who commit suicide have seen their doctor in the past month.

Source: [American Psychological Association](#)

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Depression

Depression is the condition for which your loved one may least likely seek help. Especially in our older generations, mental health carries a stigma that makes it difficult for people to speak up. Depression can worsen health in people with conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke, as they become uninclined to care for themselves appropriately.



Some indications that your loved one might be depressed are:

- Persistent sadness
- Recurring thoughts or mentions of self-harm or suicide
- Noticeable change in appetite
- Withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Heavy alcohol consumption

Source: [Centers for Disease Control](#) and [National Institute of Mental Health](#)

Dementia

Dementia is most often characterized by deterioration in memory, thinking, behavior, and the ability to perform everyday activities. While it largely affects older citizens, dementia is not a normal part of aging.



Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia, affects 12 million people worldwide. Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's is becoming increasingly possible, due to the sensitive diagnostic tools developed by psychological and medical scientists.

Early diagnosis by the doctors in your loved one's life and understanding the challenges that this condition poses are critical for the path they will follow. Especially when they are initially still cognizant of what is happening to them, dementia can trigger anxiety, depression, or even suicidal thoughts. It is important to not just prepare for the worsening dementia but to treat the current responses and fears as well.

Source: [World Health Organization](#) and [American Psychological Association](#)

Suicidal Thoughts

Suicide rates are particularly high among older Americans. Older men have the highest suicide rate of any age group at 45 per 100,000, compared to the rate of 11 per 100,000 for all ages.



Those suffering from depression are at greatest risk for suicide. Do not ignore remarks about death or self-harm. If your older family member seems depressed, get them the help that they need. An offhand remark is often a subtle cry for help. Report these comments to your loved one's doctor and encourage your relative to seek treatment immediately. If there are firearms in the home, remove them as soon as possible. **For more advice, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.** All calls are confidential.

Source: [AARP](#)



Depression or Dementia?

Depression sometimes gets mis-diagnosed as dementia, as the older adult with depression may exhibit dementia-like symptoms, such as forgetfulness, disorientation, or inattentiveness. A person with depression will complain about memory loss, while someone with Alzheimer's disease or other form of dementia will try to conceal it or not even realize they have it.

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