

Older American's Mental Health Week

10 Facts About Mental Health and Aging

1. Mental health problems are not a normal part of aging.

- While older adults may experience many losses, deep sadness that lingers for more than two weeks may signal clinical depression. Similarly, an anxiety disorder is different from normal worries.
- One in five Americans (of all ages) has a diagnosable mental disorder during any one year.
- About 5% of older adults have a diagnosable depressive illness; 11% of adults over age 55 have an anxiety disorder.

2. Mental health is as important as physical health.

- Good mental health contributes greatly to an overall feeling of well-being.
- Untreated mental health disorders in older adults can lead to diminished functioning, substance abuse, poor quality of life, and increased mortality.
- Research shows mental illness can slow healing from physical illnesses.

3. Healthy older adults can continue to thrive, grow and enjoy life!

- Reading, walking and socializing are just a few of the activities that many individuals enjoy at any age. Exercising your mind and body and maintaining social connections are good for your mental health, too.

4. Mental health problems are a risk for older adults, regardless of history.

- While some adults go through life managing a chronic mental illness, mental health problems also can appear late in life.
- Sometimes mental health deteriorates in response to a stroke, Parkinson's, cancer, arthritis or diabetes, and even some medications.
- Older adults without a history of substance abuse may abuse medications, alcohol or drugs.

5. Suicide is a risk among older adults.

- Older adults have the highest suicide rate in the country. Those aged 85 and over have the highest suicide rate; those aged 75-84 have second highest.
- Older adults' suicide attempts are more lethal. For those 65 and older, there is one suicide for every four attempts compared to one suicide for every 20 attempts for all other age groups.

6. These symptoms call for consultation with a healthcare professional:

- Sadness that has lasted longer than two weeks
- Consistent worries about issues such as money, family, and health
- Consistent trouble sleeping or concentrating
- Frequent trouble remembering things or feeling confused in familiar places
- Having more than one alcoholic drink a day or taking more medication than prescribed

7. Older adults can be helped with the same success as younger people.

- 80% of older adults recovered from depression after receiving treatment that included both psychotherapy and anti-depressant medication.

8. Our healthcare system is not adequately helping older adults with mental disorders.

- Medicare covers 80% of a physical health problem but only 50% of a mental health problem. This is a barrier to treatment for many people.
- Researchers estimate that up to 63% of older adults with a mental disorder do not receive the services they need.
- 75% of those who commit suicide have visited a primary care physician within a month of their suicide.

9. Misdiagnosis and avoidance are common.

- Primary care physicians fail to diagnose depression 50% of the time.
- Only half of older adults who discuss specific mental health problems with a physician receive any treatment.

10. Older adults have specific mental health care needs.

- Changing bodies and chemistry, changes in family and friendships and changes in living situations can all impact mental health and need to be considered in treatment.
- Sometimes helping solve basic problems, like transportation, can lower stress, improve community connections, and improve outlook and mood.
- If older adults take many medications for illnesses, drug interactions and side effects can change mood and behavior.

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health, American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry