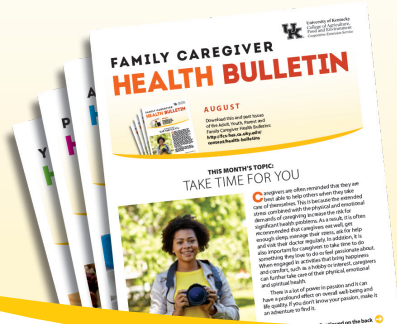




University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment  
Cooperative Extension Service

# FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



**OCTOBER 2021**

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# DEPRESSION IS NOT PART OF AGING



**D**epression is NOT a normal part of aging. Yet depression is a public health issue and a prevalent mental health challenge among older adults (CDC, 2020). Most older adults report feeling good about life, even when facing physical decline and/or illness. But there is a greater likelihood of depression among older adults if they experienced it as a younger person and/or when they experience an accumulation of loss and stress (death of loved ones, loss of independence, caregiving, medical conditions, problems with sleep, lonely/isolated, etc.) (MHA, 2021; NIH, 2021). Certain medications, substance use, and family history can also increase the risk of depression (NIH, 2021).

While it is normal at any age to feel sad, anxious, or upset over stressful experiences or life events, most people will adjust and feel better in time. When people feel tired, helpless, and hopeless, or they lose interest in favorite activities, or have trouble carrying out normal activities of daily living, they may be experiencing depression (NIH, 2021).

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# ***Depression is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness. To feel better, depression needs to be recognized and treated.***

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## **Depression is a medical condition**

According to the NIH, depression is a medical condition associated with distress and suffering. Depression is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness. To feel better, depression needs to be recognized and treated. Unfortunately, depression is often underdiagnosed and misdiagnosed among older adults (CDC, 2020; NIH, 2021). Older adults may not talk about their feelings to family or health-care professionals, they may experience less obvious symptoms of depression, they may accept their feelings as “normal,” or their symptoms may be confused for other medical conditions or as side effects to medication. Because depression can lead to physical, mental, and social impairment, it can complicate the course and treatment of chronic disease. This, especially, is a concern among older adults because of the high prevalence of chronic conditions (CDC, 2020).

## **Recognize the symptoms of depression**

It is important to recognize the signs of depression. If any of these systems persist for more than two weeks, you or your loved one may be suffering from depression and you should get help.

**According to the NIH (2021),  
signs of depression include:**

- *Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood*
- *Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities*
- *Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism*
- *Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness*
- *Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”*
- *Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions*
- *Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping*
- *Changes in appetite and/or unintended weight changes*
- *Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts*
- *Restlessness, irritability*
- *Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment*

## **Seek treatment for depression**

Left untreated, depression can lead to decreased life quality, physical illness, and suicide (NIH, 2021).

In most cases, symptoms of depression, with the right approach, can improve. The first step is to talk with a health-care professional. A doctor will review your medical history, ask how you are feeling, provide a physical exam and rule out any conditions that may be contributing to your symptoms. It is important to answer honestly, so your doctor can prescribe the right approach. Some common treatment options for depression can include medication, therapy, physical activity, and meditation (NIH, 2021). There may be other approaches depending on the severity of the depression. Remember, it may take time to start feeling better and you may need to try different medications or approaches until you find what works best for you.

## **Engage**

Do not feel shy or embarrassed if you are experiencing depression. Talk about it. Seek help. Access community resources. Even though you may not feel like it, try to find ways to lift your spirit. Do things you enjoyed before the depression, but do not be too hard on yourself. Engage in meaningful social activities, talk about your feelings, and stick to your treatment. Do not make important life decisions until you feel better, and call your doctor or get help if you have suicidal thoughts (NIH, 2021).

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**FAMILY CAREGIVER  
HEALTH BULLETIN**

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