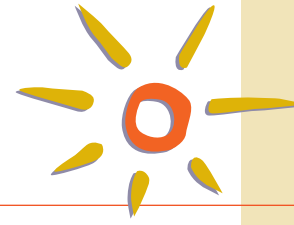


# In the Mood



A Newsletter of the Fuqua Center for Late-Life Depression of Emory University

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## Depression in Older Adults: Often Unrecognized or Undertreated - Never a Normal Part of Aging

NETTIE STREICKER MAINTAINED HER INDEPENDENCE WELL INTO HER 80s, continuing to live on her own in the same home where she'd raised her family, handling her own financial affairs, and remaining active in the community. Following her daughter's death, she began to lose interest in doing things she used to enjoy, never felt "up to it" when the grandchildren who lived out of town wanted to come by for a visit, and began having difficulty concentrating and being able to carry out simple tasks she'd done for years. After sliding to the floor one morning getting out of bed and laying there helpless for over 24 hours because she couldn't get herself up, she was moved to an assisted living setting. When she said she was thinking of jumping off the 3rd floor balcony, her granddaughter dismissed it as talk and thought nothing more of it.

**Depression is a serious illness, a medical condition that is treatable and that is NOT a normal part of growing older.**

What that granddaughter now knows is that her grandmother was one of the more than 7 million people age 65 and older who are affected by depression (Steinman, 2007), a physical disorder of the brain that is treatable and that impacts over 20 million adults overall. She also learned that older adults are at risk for suicide and for decades were the demographic group with the highest suicide rates. Thoughts of suicide by older adults must be taken seriously and active intervention by calling for help must occur.

Although everyone feels sad or unhappy at times during their life, persistent sadness that interferes with everyday life may be depression (*Geriatric Mental Health Foundation, 2008*). Depression is a serious illness, a medical condition that is treatable and that is not a normal part of growing older. Depression interferes with a person's ability to function and carry out activities of daily living. It is not a sign of weakness or something a person can "snap out of". (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, Depression, 2015*)

### Risk Factors

Factors that place an older adult at risk for depression include issues such as chronic health conditions; chronic pain; sensory loss; sleep disturbances; side effects of medications; cognitive impairment; alcohol or prescription medication misuse; stressful life events; extended bereavement; and social isolation. (*SAMHSA Issue Brief 6: Depression and Anxiety: Screening and Intervention, 2013*)

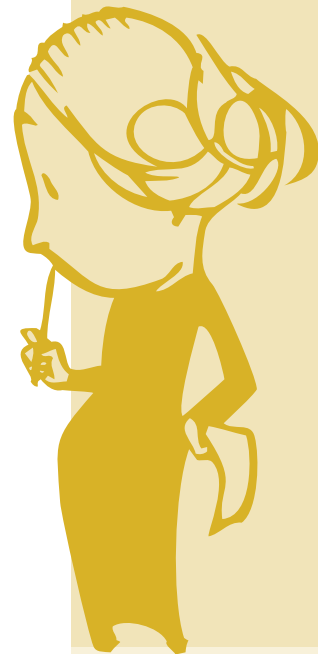
### Symptoms of Depression in Older Adults

The most common symptoms of depression in older adults include:

- Feeling sad or "empty"
- Feeling hopeless, irritable, anxious, or guilty
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Feeling very tired
- Not being able to concentrate or remember details
- Not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much
- Overeating, or not wanting to eat at all
- Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems

Symptoms lasting two (2) or more weeks should be brought to the attention of a healthcare provider.

*[continued inside]*



**Symptoms lasting two (2) or more weeks should be brought to the attention of a healthcare provider.**

[continued from cover]

## Who to call



For information about the Fuqua Center, call Michele Lyn Miles at 404-712-6941

For NEW PATIENT appointments, call 404-728-6302

For information on community education call Cathy T. Rambach at 404-712-6942

For information on the Senior Peer Support Group facilitated by Certified Peer Specialists contact Jocelyn Chen Wise 404-712-6943

For information about Transitions Senior Program, call Ed Lawrence at 404-728-6975

To be added to our newsletter mailing list sign up at [www.fuquacenter.org/newsletter](http://www.fuquacenter.org/newsletter) or e-mail [m.l.miles@emory.edu](mailto:m.l.miles@emory.edu)



## Unrecognized/Undertreated

Symptoms of depression in an older adult are sometimes hard to recognize as sadness may not be the main symptom. Some older adults don't want to discuss their feelings or are only willing to share a small part of what they are experiencing. ([nihseniorhealth.gov](http://nihseniorhealth.gov), May, 2016). As a result, depression is frequently under-recognized and under-treated in older adults. (SAMHSA Issue Brief 6: *Depression and Anxiety: Screening and Intervention*, 2013)

"Healthcare providers may mistake an older adult's symptoms of depression as just a natural reaction to illness or the life changes that may occur as we age, and therefore not see the depression as something to be treated. Older adults themselves often share this belief and do not seek help because they don't understand that they could feel better with appropriate treatment." (CDC, [www.cdc.gov/aging/mentalhealth/depression](http://www.cdc.gov/aging/mentalhealth/depression), March, 2015)

**Depression is frequently under-recognized and under-treated in older adults.**

## Depression is a Treatable Illness

If you or a loved one are experiencing symptoms of depression or if you think you might be depressed, make an appointment with your doctor or your health care provider. "Treatment for late-life depression can be highly successful. Studies show that treatment for older patients can return individuals to normal physical and emotional functioning. The first step is to obtain a complete physical workup to determine if the person has a treatable medical syndrome that is associated with depressive symptoms. The next step

is to determine the best treatment option." (William M. McDonald, M.D., *Detecting Late-Life Depression in Older Adults*, May, 2010) In order to raise awareness and reduce stigma for those experiencing depression, it is important that we provide on-going education to both the public and to medical professionals on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression in the older adult and help them understand that depression is **NOT** a normal part of growing older.

For more information on older adults and mental health visit [www.fuquacenter.org](http://www.fuquacenter.org) or

Older Adults & Mental Health:  
How to Find Help



<http://aging.dhs.georgia.gov/mental-health-resources>.



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# Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)

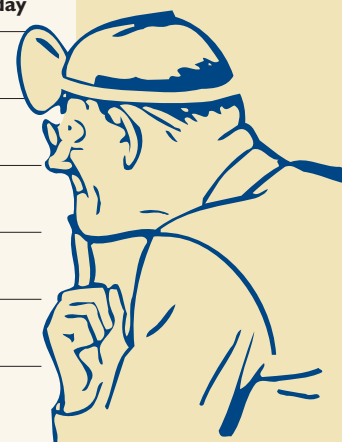
Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

(Circle or use a check mark to indicate your answer)

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day				
1 Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3				
2 Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3				
3 Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3				
4 Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3				
5 Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3				
6 Feeling bad about yourself - or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3				
7 Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3				
8 Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite - being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3				
9 Thoughts that you would be better off dead or hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3				
FOR OFFICE CODING	0	+	_____	+	_____	+	_____	= Total Score: _____

- 10 If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?
- ☐ Not difficult at all    ☐ Somewhat difficult    ☐ Very difficult    ☐ Extremely difficult

Developed by Drs. Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B.W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke and colleagues, with an educational grant from Pfizer Inc.  
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**THE PATIENT HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE (PHQ-9) IS A DEPRESSION SCREENING TOOL** that asks 10 questions about issues a person may have experienced in the past two (2) weeks related to their mood. It can be filled out at home and then taken to one's healthcare provider for review and applicable follow-up.



**If you or a loved one are experiencing symptoms of depression or if you think you might be depressed, make an appointment with your doctor or your health care provider.**





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Brain Health Center  
12 Executive Park Drive NE, 5th Floor  
Atlanta, GA 30329  
404-712-6941

[www.fuquacenter.org](http://www.fuquacenter.org)



## Help Continue the Work of the Fuqua Center

### WHY MAKE A GIFT TO THE FUQUA CENTER?

Your gifts help to improve access to clinical services for older adults, increase public awareness and understanding that depression is NOT a normal part of aging, as well as maintain extensive community outreach efforts aimed at educating those who serve older adults. The Fuqua Center for Late-Life Depression of Emory University, a community education and outreach entity within the Division of Geriatric Psychiatry, relies on private support from generous partners like you to sustain its comprehensive programs and services. Each and every contribution makes a difference and has an impact.

**To make a gift online, visit [www.fuquacenter.org/donations](http://www.fuquacenter.org/donations)**



### Contributions to help continue the work of the Fuqua Center for Late-Life Depression of Emory University

Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_. Please note that this contribution is:

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