



Older Adults: Depression and Suicide Facts

Major depression, a significant predictor of suicide in older adults, is a widely underrecognized and undertreated medical illness.

Depression often co-occurs with other medical illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer. Because many older adults face such physical illnesses, as well as various social and economic difficulties, individual health care professionals often mistakenly conclude that depression is a normal consequence of these problems—an attitude often shared by patients themselves. These factors conspire to make the illness underdiagnosed and undertreated. Both doctors and patients may have difficulty identifying the signs of depression.

Suicide warning signs

- **Feelings of despair and hopelessness.**
- **Rehearsing suicide**, or seriously discussing specific suicide methods.

- **Drug or alcohol abuse** can worsen symptoms of depression or mania, decrease the effectiveness of medication, enhance impulsive behavior and cloud judgment.
- **Beginning to feel better**—It may sound strange, but a person with depression may be most likely to attempt suicide just when he seems to have passed an episode's low point and be on the way to recovery.

Treatment for depression

- **Antidepressant medications.**
- **Psychotherapy**, especially cognitive-behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy.

Approximately 80 percent of older adults with depression improve when they receive appropriate treatment with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of medication and psychotherapy.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

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