

# Late-life Depression

## For patients and visitors

FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR IF YOU NOTICE ANY SIGN THAT MIGHT BE SUGGESTIVE OF DEPRESSION, TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR OR HEALTHCARE TEAM. THEY CAN ASSIST WITH PROPER DIAGNOSIS, RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES.

RUNNYMEDE HEALTHCARE CENTRE
625 Runnymede Rd.
Toronto, ON M6S 3A3
T: 416 762 7316
F: 416 762 3836
www.runnymedehc.ca

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# WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Late life depression is a serious illness caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. Biological, psychological, and/or social factors can all play a role in triggering depression. Triggers may vary and may include significant life changes and high levels of stress. Late-life depression is very treatable when it is recognized and properly taken care of.

## WARNING SIGNS

- Feeling sad
- Eating more or less than usual
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Difficulty thinking or remembering things
- Low energy
- Thoughts of suicide
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable

## THE MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF LATE-LIFE DEPRESSION INCLUDE:

- persistent sadness (lasting two weeks or more)
- feeling slowed down
- excessive worries about finances and health problems
- frequent tearfulness
- feeling worthless or helpless
- weight changes
- pacing and fidgeting
- difficulty sleeping
- difficulty concentrating
- physical symptoms such as pain or gastrointestinal problems

## MANIFESTATIONS OF LATE VS. EARLY DEPRESSION

The depressed person or their family members may think that a change in mood or behaviour is simply “a passing mood” and the person should just “snap out of it.” But someone suffering from depression cannot just “get over it.” Depression is a medical illness that must be diagnosed and treated by trained professionals. Untreated, depression may last months or even years.

## DEPRESSION PREVENTION

- Take medication as prescribed. It may take some time for the clinical benefits of antidepressants to become evident Regular review of medications by a doctor is necessary
- Continue to take medications as prescribed even after symptoms improve Medications may be required for several months after symptoms subside to prevent relapse
- Promote daily exercise
- Eat a balanced diet and maintain a regular sleep pattern
- Be aware of the impact of depression on other domains of functioning
- Maintain social engagement

## TREATMENT OPTIONS

Depression deserves the same care and attention as any other medical condition. There is no shame in seeking help. Treatment options for depression include antidepressant medications, available from a family doctor, and counselling. Both can be very effective. Older adults who are contemplating suicide should speak to their doctor or healthcare provider right away.

For information and referral to mental health services available in Ontario, contact the **Mental Health Service Information Ontario** toll free at 1 866 531-2600. This free and confidential service is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.