

Caregiver Assistance Newsletter

Mental Illness, Depression, Stress

Mental illness can begin at any age, from childhood through senior years. Because elderly people may have a *combination* of medical, psychological and social issues, diagnosing and managing mental health problems can be challenging.

Mental illness refers to a wide range of disorders that affect mood, thinking, and behavior. These can include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors. Many people have mental health *concerns* from time to time; these only become a *mental illness* when the signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect the ability to function in daily life, work or relationships.

Many people with debilitating mental health issues avoid treatment or think that this is a normal part of aging. In most cases, mental illness symptoms can be managed with a combination of medications and counseling (psychotherapy).

Mental illness is a leading cause of disability. Aside from reducing overall quality of life, untreated mental illness can cause severe emotional, behavioral, physical health, legal and financial problems.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Each year many thousands of older persons are abused, neglected, and exploited. Domestic violence among older adults is a form of elder abuse, and it can turn a home into a place of fear, hopelessness and desperation. If you are in danger, call 911, your local hotline, or the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224.

Source: Domestic Violence Awareness Month, visit the Domestic Violence Awareness Project www.nrcdv.org

Symptoms

Symptoms of mental illness may include unusual thinking, behavior or emotions; sadness and anxiety, withdrawing from friends and family, excessive energy, sleep disturbance and even delusions or hallucinations.

Others may be the first to realize there's a problem. In these cases, have an open and honest discussion with the person in your care about your concerns. You can also help him find a qualified provider and make an appointment. You may even be able to go with him. Most mental illnesses don't improve on their own, and if untreated, a mental illness may get worse.



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Possible Causes—No one is sure what causes mental illness. Factors that may play a role:

Inherited traits. Mental illness may run in families and a life situation may trigger it in those who are at risk.

Biological factors. Outside forces such as severe brain injury or exposure to viruses or toxins before birth.

Life experiences. Challenging situations like the loss of a loved one and high stress may trigger mental illness. Being brought up with low self-esteem or enduring sexual or physical abuse can lead to unhealthy patterns of thinking.

Brain chemistry. Hormone imbalances may play a role.

Mental illness is a leading cause of disability and left untreated, mental illness can cause severe emotional, behavioral, physical health, legal and financial problems.

Coping and Support—Coping with a mental illness is challenging. Provide support by helping him/her:

Learn about the illness - so you (and family) understand what he/she is going through and how to help.

Keep connected with friends and family - to participate in social activities, ask for help when needed and tell loved ones about how he's doing.

Keep a journal - to track what triggers or improves his symptoms. Journaling is also a healthy way to explore and express pain, anger, fear and other emotions.

Join a support group - to connect with others facing similar challenges. Support groups are available in many communities and online. Visit NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness at www.nami.org

Source: MayoClinic.com; National Alliance on Mental Illness; Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration

New Dates for Changing Your Medicare Coverage

In 2011 you'll have more time to choose and join a private health or drug plan when the annual open enrollment period gets an earlier start than usual in the fall.

This year, it will kick off on **October 15th** and wrap up on **December 7th**. As always, your new coverage will take effect on January 1.

If you want or need to change your private Medicare Advantage health plan, there's a new annual "**disenrollment**" period that allows you to switch back to Original Medicare and a drug plan between **January 1st** and **February 14th**.

Suicide Prevention

Suicidal thoughts and behavior are common with some mental illnesses. If you think the person in your care may hurt himself or attempt suicide, call **911** or your local emergency number immediately, or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)** to reach a trained counselor.

Taking Care of Yourself—Keep Training Your Brain

Your brain is like a muscle; if you don't use it, you lose it! The brain declines not from aging, but from lack of use. Watching television requires less brain energy than looking at a wall! So, play cards, write a letter, do crossword puzzles, stay social, take a class or get into an activity that you enjoy and that stretches your mind. (Source: *Dare To Be 100*; Walter M. Bortz, M.D.; 1996 Fireside)

Inspiration

*Hope for miracles, but don't rely
on one.*

~Yiddish proverb

Good Friends Are the Secret to Long Life

Exercise, diet, and stress reduction help us live better and longer lives. Researchers *also* found that people with good friends live longer. In fact, having good friends can extend your life to the same degree as quitting smoking!

Source: Researchers at Brigham Young University

Don't Fall – Be Safe

When walking is difficult, seniors sometimes find it hard to concentrate on *both* talking and walking at the same time. Don't ask complicated questions while you are helping the person in your care go up and down stairs, get in or out of the bath, or in low-light situations.

LIVE LIFE LAUGHING

I'd say it's your liver, but if you insist on a second opinion... I'll say gall bladder.



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**LifeSpan Resources
"Family Caregiver
Support Group"**

Below is the meeting time
our family caregiver support
group. This is a great place to
find relief from stress, meet
other caregivers and draw from
their experiences.

**1st Thurs. of ea. month
St. Luke's United Church of
Christ
329 Walnut Street
Jeffersonville, IN 47130
6:30pm to 8:00pm**

Help Control Mental Illness Symptoms

To control stress and reduce symptoms, encourage him/her to:

- Actively participate in treatment**, by working with providers to decide on the best treatment options, depending on symptoms and severity, personal preferences, insurance coverage, side effects and other factors.
- Stick to the treatment plan**, so that symptoms don't return. If he is having medication side effects, talk to the doctor before making changes.
- Pay attention to warning signs** and triggers. Know what to do if symptoms return.
- Keep up routine medical care**, by getting regular checkups.
- Get help when needed**, as mental health conditions are harder to treat if you wait until symptoms become severe. Maintenance treatment prevents relapse.
- Maintain good health**, by getting enough sleep, eating healthy meals, and exercising.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol**, which can worsen symptoms or interact with medications.

Source: MayoClinic.com