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Recognizing Depression in Older Adults

Warning signs look different in everyone. In the older Americans, you may see:

- Unrelenting low mood
- Desperation
- Breaking medical regimens like taking prescriptions, attending appointments and following diets
- Loss of interest in activities that were previously enjoyable.
- Decreased self-care or grooming
- Putting affairs in order, making changes to will
- Stockpiling pills or obtaining other lethal means
- Increased alcohol and/or other drug use
- Recent impulsiveness and/or taking unnecessary risk.

[Suicide Prevention Lifeline](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

5 Tips to Have a Happy Holiday

By Kristen Bevill, MD

For many seniors, changes in mood are often triggered by the sentimentality, traditions, and expectations of the holidays. The important thing is to acknowledge your feelings and know there are things you can do to help make yourself feel better. The 2015 U.S. Aging Survey from the National Council on Aging pinpoints the top five habits that older adults and professionals agree help people stay mentally sharp and healthy.



1. Look For The Joy - Keeping a positive attitude is key. Focus on the present and being grateful for whom and what you have in your life. Appreciate the things you can do and enjoy doing, and redefine what makes the holidays happy to you.

2. Appreciate Others - Staying socially connected is vital. If you aren't spending the holidays with family or friends, keep active and engaged by volunteering, going to a senior center, joining a hobby club or social group, or taking a class.

3. Eat Healthy and Wise - It is tempting to overindulge during the holidays. You can still savor a holiday meal and enjoy a little treat. Just stick to sensible portions.

4. Make Some Happy Moves - Any movement that improves circulation is good for brain health. Regular exercise positively affects your mood, sleep, appetite, and overall well-being. The key is to move whatever you can for as long as you can, even if you are limited by being in a bed or chair.

5. Sleep Well - Sleep is necessary to both physical and mental health. Excessive stress or a change in schedule due to the holidays can disrupt sleep patterns. Try to follow your regular sleep schedule, get some exercise and fresh air during the day, or enjoy a midday nap.

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A case of the blues should resolve itself within a short period of time. Be aware that if feelings of sadness, irritability, fatigue, loss of interest, changes in sleep or eating habits, or unexplained physical discomfort persist for more than a few weeks, it could be signs of clinical depression.

Know that depression is a treatable medical illness and NOT a normal symptom of aging. It is estimated to affect 35 million Americans aged 65 or older and can be caused by changes in brain chemistry, genetics, stress, or other factors. Once diagnosed, 80 percent of depressed individuals can be effectively treated with medications, psychotherapy, or a combination of treatments.

Strategies for Making the Most of Our Family Holidays with Seniors

By Kathy Birket

Many of us look forward all year long to spending time with our family members during the holiday season. When we have family members who are aging, the holidays may feel even more important due to a sense of urgency from knowing there may not be many more holidays to spend with them.

Making Holiday Time Special

- Schedule time with older family members that fits into their routine.
- Limit size of gatherings so loved ones don't become overstimulated, especially those who can become agitated when there are many people and lots of conversation that seems too loud.
- Take pictures and video during the visit to record the memories. You can then share these with other family members who might not be able to join the festivities, as well as keep for the future.
- Bring with you any old photo albums or mementos to share with your senior loved ones. These can start the reminiscing and bring out the family stories.
- Set aside some time when visiting a senior to look for signs of neglect or a need to provide additional care options. Look for signs of problems such as spoiled food in the refrigerator, unkempt personal care, unpaid bills or unopened mail, extreme clutter, or unsafe areas in the home requiring maintenance.
- Continue family traditions while you are all together, both to create a holiday routine familiar to senior loved ones and to keep the traditions alive.
- Bring the celebration (in the right dose) to your senior, as traveling to other people's homes or other locales might increase confusion in aging family members, especially those with dementia.
- Be sure everyone who's going to visit is aware of the current mental and physical situation so they don't show alarm or ask the senior to do more than is safe.
- Be alert to signs that your senior is ready for a break and needs some time to rest. Arrange time for a nap or a quiet place to rest during your visit so they don't get overtired or become irritated.

Taking small steps to keep them in their routine and enjoying the family memories and traditions can help turn the holiday into hours of love while making new memories!

