



SENIOR SERVICES
Helping Our Elderly Live With Dignity

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“I’M DOING THE BEST I CAN” RECOGNIZING CAREGIVER DEPRESSION

Most people have either experienced depression at some time in their life or have known of someone who did. Depression is a medical condition that is caused by a chemical imbalance in the body. Depression causes you to feel sad or hopeless for an extended period of time. It can be triggered by stressful life events. If you are a caregiver you cope with extraordinary conditions over which you have little or no control. Since most caregivers sacrifice their own physical and emotional needs in order to care for someone else, all of this takes its toll. Often the toll is in the form of depression, and the resulting feelings of anger, anxiety, sadness, isolation, guilt and exhaustion.

Symptoms and Signs of Depression

People experience depression in different ways. The type and degree of symptoms vary by individual and can change over time. However, there are some common symptoms of depression that may last for weeks and even months if left untreated. Some of these symptoms are:

- Changes in eating habits or appetite resulting in unwanted weight gain or loss
- Changes in sleeping patterns—too much sleep or not enough
- Feeling tired all of the time
- Loss of interest in people and/or activities that you once enjoyed
- Easily agitated or angered
- Feeling that nothing you do is good enough
- Feelings of guilt and hopelessness; wondering if life is worth living
- Thoughts of death or suicide or attempted suicide
- Complaints that have no physical cause such as headache and stomachache
- Inability to concentrate or complete tasks
- Loss of sex drive

All of these symptoms can interfere with your quality of life. If you experience a few of these symptoms for more than a couple of weeks, see a physician for treatment.

Treatment of Depression

Depression is usually treated successfully with professional counseling, antidepressant medication, or a combination of the two. Any treatment should be evaluated regularly to ensure that it continues to contribute towards your improved health and well-being. Exercise can reduce the effects of depression. Arranging time to exercise is sometimes difficult for caregivers. Ask someone to stay with your loved one while you go for a walk or utilize respite services to plan some time for yourself.

Other Suggestions to Help with Depression

- Set realistic goals
- Break large tasks into small ones, set some priorities and do what you can as you can.
- Participate in activities that give you pleasure and make you feel better
- Be with other people.
- Confide in someone—a friend or pastor
- Realize that your mood may not improve overnight....it will improve gradually.
- Exercise positive thinking. Replace any negatives thoughts with positive ones.
- Let your family and friends help you.
- Take time to care for yourself.
- Participate in a support group.

Give yourself credit for what you are doing as a caregiver. And above all else, realize and accept that caring for your loved one is one of the most beautiful and rewarding gifts you could give.