

OLDER ADULT MENTAL HEALTH

MYTH VS REALITY

Mental health and well-being are just as important in the later years of our lives. Below are some common myths associated with mental health. Help break the stigma associated with mental health treatment by reaching out if you need help and encouraging others to do the same.



MYTH:

Feeling sad or depressed is part of growing old. There's nothing you can do to help older adults.

REALITY: Depression is a serious medical condition that is not a normal part of aging and is often treated successfully. Believing that depression is inevitable prevents older people from seeking and getting the help they need.



MYTH:

Suicide is only a problem among the young.

REALITY: While older adults comprise just 12% of the population, they make up approximately 18% of suicides. Men 65 and older face the highest overall rate of suicide.* Untreated depression and other psychiatric illnesses are often significant underlying causes of suicide in older adults.

**Sep 7, 2021 National Council on Aging*



MYTH:

The most common sign of depression is crying.

REALITY: Older adults are more likely to experience loss of interest or pleasure in activities as a symptom of depression than sadness or crying. Further, because of the strong negative prejudice and discrimination associated with mental health conditions, many older adults are afraid to seek help. Other signs of depression include being easily upset and fearful, forgetful, confused, hopeless, lonely, and tired. Loss of appetite is also common.



MYTH:

Treating substance misuse and abuse issues in older adults wastes time and effort. It's too late for them to change.

REALITY: Substance misuse and abuse interventions and mental health treatments are as effective with older adults as with younger adults. Intervention and treatment can significantly improve the quality of life. Untreated mental illness is often linked to substance misuse and abuse among older adults.

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MYTH:

Older adults suffering from depression or anxiety disorders lack the inner strength to fight the debilitating feelings.

REALITY: Depression and anxiety disorders have many possible causes. Lack of inner strength is not one of them. Causes of depression and anxiety include heredity, stressful events such as the death of a loved one, retirement, health problems, and reactions to medicine. Drug interactions and alcohol and drug combinations can also lead to depression and anxiety.

MYTH:

Grief is the same as depression.

REALITY: Grief after loss is a normal reaction, but grief that lasts more than six months or is severe is a concern and should be addressed. A comprehensive assessment is needed to determine whether the condition is depression or grief.

MYTH:

Medication is the best way to treat behavioral health challenges in older adults.

REALITY: Most older adults actually prefer psychotherapy to medications, and sometimes the best treatment is the one that is accepted. Research shows that a combination of evidence-based psychotherapy and medication is the most beneficial way of treating depression and other mental illnesses. Sometimes older adults will be prescribed a medication with no additional services, and they and their families become disappointed and disillusioned when it is not helpful.

NUMBERS TO KNOW

PA Support & Referral Helpline • 1-855-284-2494 (TTY: 724-631-5600)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline • Call or Text 988

Crisis Text Line • Text PA to 741741

Veteran Crisis Line • Call 988 then Press 1

Disaster Distress Helpline • 1-800-985-5990

Trans Helpline • 877-565-8860



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