

IS IT ANGER, OR SOMETHING MORE? UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION IN OLDER MEN



When people picture depression, they often think of sadness. But in older men, depression does not always look like sadness on the outside.

Sometimes it looks like anger. It can sound like a short temper, constant frustration, or snapping over small things. It can look like shutting down, withdrawing from family, or seeming "hard to reach." It may even show up as restlessness, sleep problems, or physical complaints like headaches or stomach issues. National mental health organizations note that irritability, anger, and physical symptoms can all be part of depression, including in men. Unfortunately, these signs are easy to miss or misinterpret.

Family members may think, "He is just grumpy," or "That is just how he is getting older." But depression is not a normal part of aging, and it is treatable.

WHY THIS GETS MISSED IN OLDER MEN

Many older men grew up in a time when emotional struggles were not talked about openly. Some were taught to stay busy, stay strong, and handle problems on their own. Because of that, depression may come out sideways instead of sounding like "I feel depressed."

An older man may say:

"I don't need to talk about it."

"People get on my nerves."

"I'm just tired."

"I don't sleep anymore."

"My stomach has been off."

At the same time, he may be:

- Pulling away from family or friends
- Losing interest in hobbies
- Drinking more than usual
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling restless, edgy, or frustrated most days

Check out the next page for more.

These can all be signs that something deeper is going on. The National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute on Aging both note that depression can include irritability, sleep changes, withdrawal, and increased alcohol use, and NIA specifically notes that sadness is not always the main symptom in older adults.

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION IN OLDER MEN

Every person is different, but here are a few common examples of changes families and loved ones may recognize:

The "short fuse" change

A man who used to be patient now gets irritated quickly. He may seem angry over everyday things, but underneath that anger may be stress, hopelessness, or emotional pain.

The "checking out" change

He spends more time alone, stops going places, or loses interest in activities he used to enjoy. He may say he is "fine," but he is less engaged and harder to connect with.

The "physical symptoms first" change

He talks more about body aches, headaches, poor sleep, or low energy than emotions. That does not mean the symptoms are "all in his head." Depression and physical health are closely connected, and many people notice physical symptoms first.

The "coping" change

He starts using alcohol more often, works constantly, or distracts himself all day to avoid talking or feeling. These behaviors can look like coping, but they may also be signs of depression.

WHAT FAMILIES AND LOVED ONES CAN DO

If you are concerned about an older man in your life, a good first goal is just to open the door for a conversation. Try these tips:

- Try:
- Choose a calm moment to talk
 - Share your concerns, not criticisms
 - Name what you have noticed
 - Keep the conversation simple and respectful

You might say:

- "I have noticed you seem more frustrated lately, and I care about you."
- "You have not seemed like yourself. How are you doing, really?"
- "I know you have been dealing with a lot. You do not have to handle it alone."
- "Would you be open to talking with your doctor about sleep, stress, or mood?"

CDC and NIA both encourage loved ones to support older adults by helping them connect with care and even offering to go with them to an appointment.

WE CAN HELP.

Our hospital-based outpatient program is designed to meet the unique needs of older adults experiencing depression and/or anxiety related to life changes that are often associated with aging or a chronic diagnosis. Anyone can make a referral to our program, including self-referrals, provider referrals, or community consultations.

Call us today at