

Older Adults Physical and Emotional Wellbeing During the Winter Months

Many of us have heard of the condition called seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. Most recently, it has been referred to as major depressive disorder (MDD) with seasonal pattern. You may also be familiar with the expression “winter blues”. The winter blues can be much more than just feeling down at any age and it can be difficult to diagnose. In the elderly, it can sometime be even more difficult to diagnose. With chronic health conditions, living alone, and holiday reminders of days past, the winter blues can feel unbeatable. Research has shown that **older adults** often become more sedentary during the winter months. This leads to both **physical and mental** isolation.

Why the Winter Time?

Experts say the combination of pre-existing health conditions, freezing temperatures, flu, isolation, sedentary and procrastination in contacting a healthcare provider when not feeling well puts seniors at high risk.

It is important to understand that depression can occur simultaneous to other health conditions. The National Institute of Mental health shares that depression in older adults can coexist with other serious medical illnesses such as [diabetes](#), cancer, heart disease, and [Parkinson’s disease](#). Depression can cause these conditions to worsen and vice versa

Prevention

- **Advise people to stay active, don’t stop activities just because of the cold. Find new indoor activities for the winter months.**
- **Contact their doctor as soon as they realize they are not feeling**
- **Don’t isolate, get involved**
- **Advise people to ask their providers about ways to combat depression during the winter months**

Depression is treatable even when other illnesses are present

Do not dismiss depression as a normal part of having a chronic illness. Effective treatment for depression is available and can help even someone has another medical illness or condition.

Kearney County Health Services' Senior Life Solutions program is an intensive outpatient group therapy program designed to meet the unique emotional needs of individuals typically ages 65 and older who are struggling with life challenges, or depression and anxiety that can sometimes be related to aging. Contact Senior Life Solutions at 308-832-3400 Option 4 with questions on how to help your loved ones during these winter months.

References:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/>