

Resources

If you are concerned about yourself or someone you love, talk with your primary care doctor, geriatrician, social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, or geriatric psychiatrist. For more information on depression, including how to locate a geriatric psychiatrist, visit www.GMHFonline.org or call (301) 654-7850.

Alexandria Office of Aging and Adult Services, 2525 Mount Vernon Avenue Unit 5, Alexandria, VA 22301 (703)838-0920

Administration on Aging, US Dept of Human Svc 330 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20201 (202)245-0724

Fairfax County Department of Family Services' Fairfax Area Agency on Aging, 12011 Government Center Parkway Suite 708, Fairfax, VA 22035 (703)324-5411

Loudoun County, Area Agency on Aging, 215 Depot Court SE, Leesburg, VA 20176 (703)777-0255

Content obtained from the SeniorNavigator, Virginia's Resource for Health and Aging and the Geriatric Mental Health Foundation. Edited by Genea Luck, MA, Program Manager, Congregational Health Partnership.

Articles in this newsletter are not a substitute for the care and advice of medical professionals. When you have a question or need medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, consult your physician.

This newsletter is produced by Inova Health System in conjunction with your faith community. If you prefer not to receive this newsletter, please notify the appropriate personnel in your faith community.

Inova Health System is a not-for-profit health care system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services including emergency and urgent care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health, blood donor services, and wellness classes. Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to improve the health of the diverse community we serve through excellence in patient care, education and research.



Congregational Health Partnership
8003 Forbes Place, Suite 102
Springfield, VA 22151

Phone: 703-321-2602
Fax: 703-321-1978

www.inova.org/chp
www.inova.org



December
2008
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Inova
Community
Affairs Division*



For Your Health

Holiday Healing

During the Holidays, Be Alert for Depression Among Older Adults.

More than the Winter Blues

For most people, the holidays are a time of joy and celebration. For many Americans, it is a time to visit with friends and families and enjoy religious events.

But for some older adults, the winter holidays can be a very lonely and difficult time. Often overlooked, the holiday season may be the prime time that many older adults experience depression.

During the holidays, some older adults may focus on the absence of parents, siblings, children and friends who have died, and this can be very emotional.

Also, many people travel during the holidays. However, many older adults are no longer able to drive, or afford to travel, so the distance of loved ones who have moved away becomes more noticed during the holidays.

Traditional holiday reunions and rituals that were observed in the past may not be possible anymore, and the holidays may seem to lack meaning. As we come together during this holiday season, we pray for healing and understanding for our elders.

How to Prevent Holiday Depression

- ♥ During the holidays, plan activities that you enjoy! Avoid routines that you don't enjoy and plan something different.
- ♥ Poor health can contribute to depression.
- ♥ Take care of your body, mind and your spirit!
- ♥ Eat well.
- ♥ Take medications as prescribed.
- ♥ Get plenty of rest and plenty of activity.

Be aware of those possible factors in holiday depression in older adults:

- ♥ Financial limitations
- ♥ Loss of independence
- ♥ Being alone or separated from loved ones
- ♥ Failing eyesight (and lessening of the ability to write or read holiday correspondence)
- ♥ Loss of mobility and/or the inability to get to religious services

How to Help?

Friends and families of older adults can make a world of difference in helping an older adult cope better with the Holidays:

- ♥ Communicate with the older adults in your life—both those near and far. Phone calls and visits, no matter how brief, help everyone stay connected. Talk about great memories to have positive reflection.
- ♥ Encourage regular social outings and contacts. Don't push, but make yourself available for transportation and other services that may be needed.
- ♥ If you think an older friend or family member may be depressed, explain to him or her that you are concerned and why. Lend a sympathetic ear and offer to accompany the individual to a doctor.

What are the Signs and Symptoms?

Be familiar with the following symptoms of late-life depression. Symptoms of depression usually last over two weeks.

- * Sadness that does not go away
- * Withdrawal from regular social activities
- * Slowed thinking or response
- * Lack of energy or interest in things that were once enjoyable
- * Worry about finances or health
- * Frequent tearfulness
- * Feelings of worthlessness or helplessness
- * Weight changes
- * Pacing and fidgeting
- * Changes in sleep patterns (inability to sleep or sleeping too much)
- * Inability to concentrate
- * Staring off into space (or at the television) for long periods of time

