

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY IN OLDER PEOPLE

As people become older, it is not unusual for them to experience periods of depression and anxiety. *Marie-Anne Schull (Older Adults Project Manager, beyondblue)*, a key speaker at the Productive Ageing Forum, spoke about depression and anxiety in older people.



Everyone feels down and sad at times in their life but Marie-Anne said that depression differs because the feelings are sustained and last for two weeks or more. People who are depressed feel down, miserable and can show a lack of interest and pleasure in things that they once found enjoyable. Of course, different people show different symptoms.

Depression in older people

Marie-Anne said that depression in older people is the same condition that is experienced by younger people, but some symptoms may be accentuated or different. Older people may report more physical symptoms (such

as pain in various parts of their body), or experience memory problems or lose considerable amounts of weight. They are also more likely to use different language to describe their feelings, for example they might say ‘my nerves’ instead of describing their sadness.

Anxiety in older people

Older people, like everyone else, may feel anxious and very worried but an anxiety disorder is more than just feeling stressed or worried. People experiencing anxieties usually feel overwhelmed and find that their feelings are difficult to control.

	Common symptoms of depression	Common symptoms of anxiety
Feeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling indecisive Feeling overwhelmed Feeling irritable Lacking confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People experience sudden, intense, panic People feel overwhelmed People feel irritable
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling tired all the time, sick and rundown Experiencing disturbed sleep patterns such as waking early Experiencing a change in appetite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excessive sweating Muscle pain Sleeping difficulties Restlessness
Behavioural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawing and not socialising Having poor concentration Drinking excessively or using other drugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawing from social interactions Having difficulty concentrating Drinking excessively or using other drugs
Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having negative thoughts Having suicidal thoughts Feeling worthless and hopeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worrying constantly Having obsessive, recurring thoughts

There are a number of different types of anxiety and stress disorders, Marie-Anne said. They include generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and social phobias.

Although anxiety in older people is not as well researched as anxiety in other groups of people, the condition is easier to recognise in older people because they show symptoms such as agitation and fearfulness. Anxiety in older people can depend on their situation and if they have a past history of anxiety there is a greater chance that they will experience it again.

The rate of depression and anxiety in older people

Marie-Anne presented statistics showing that within the general population the rate of depression is approximately 15% and the rate of anxiety is 26%. Older adults in the community have a rate of between 10% and 30% for depression and 26.2% for anxiety. The rate of depression for older adults living in residential care was approximately 35%, but for anxiety is unknown. Marie-Anne also said that older men (85+) had the highest suicide rate in the population. Women, on the other hand had a lower suicide rate than men, except for those aged between 80 and 84 years.

Reducing the risk of depression and anxiety

Marie-Anne said that the most significant risk factor for depression is dementia. Other risk factors to watch out for include grief and loss, chronic illness and pain, moving to residential care and being a carer. Getting help can reduce the risk of depression and anxiety, yet 75% of older people do not seek help (compared with 50% in the general population). Staying connected and interacting with friends and family, improving your diet and exercising can help with both reducing the risk and improving existing symptoms of depression and anxiety. There are also effective medications and psychological treatments available.

More information about depression, anxiety, available treatments and where to get help can be found at beyondblue.org.au, 1300 22 4636 or infoline@beyondblue.org.au

This fact sheet was developed using information provided by Marie-Ann Schull (Older Adults Project Manager, beyondblue) in her presentation on Depression and Anxiety in Older People at the Productive Ageing Forum 2014.

Getting help can reduce the risk of depression and anxiety

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50% of the general population do not seek help

