

Depression and Older Adults

At Vida Psychology we strongly believe in providing individuals with information to make sense of what they are feeling so then they can start implementing strategies to address what brings them to us in the first place.

Although older adults tend to experience more illness or physical problems as compared to the general population, they nevertheless feel satisfied and happy with their lives. Depression in older adults can be difficult to diagnose because their symptoms may not be as obvious.

Symptoms

- Feeling tired.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Out of character Grumpiness and irritability.
- Loss of appetite or interest in food.
- Preference to keep to themselves.
- Confusion or attention difficulties.
- Unresolved grief.

Who is at risk of developing depression when elderly

- Those with chronic physical illnesses or disabilities.
- Older carers.
- Isolated individuals.

Causes of Depression in older adults

Following are just some examples of what can cause depression in older adults:

- **Medical conditions** – heart conditions, stroke, diabetes or cancer may cause depressive symptoms.
- **Medications** – some medications to treat physical conditions can unfortunately result in mood disorders.
- **History of depression** – older adults who experienced depression when young are more vulnerable to developing depression.
- **Unresolved grief** – the loss of a loved one that has persisted for a long time.
- **Lack of Supports** – lacking supports from family and friends.

Treatments for Depression

At Vida Psychology we ensure to use only evidence based psychological interventions. Following are some examples:

- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** It is an approach that can bring long lasting relief after short term treatment. It focuses on individuals' views and interpretations of themselves and the world and how these impact on their moods and behaviour. The objective is to identify these interpretations, challenge and replace them with more helpful interpretations. One important element of CBT is to engage on behavioural tasks that challenge those interpretations. This allows

individuals the opportunity to see firsthand the inaccuracy of their views. This in turn facilitates change.

- **Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT):** It focuses on identifying and addressing interpersonal relationships and the expectations of others that may contribute to the person's depression. The objective is to help people develop assertive communication, increase adaptability, increase supports and develop new ways to resolve conflict and nurture relationships.

Depression in the elderly can significantly affect mortality if left untreated either due to suicide or exacerbation of physical illnesses. According to the Australian Psychological Society, studies show suicide rate is higher in this group than any other. In addition, some studies have shown that 20% of elderly attended a visit with their GPs on the same day they suicided and 40% of those who suicided visited their GPs within one week prior.

How to get help

Your Family Doctor/ General Practitioner is a great first point of call. He/ she has established relationships with Psychologists and Psychiatrists highly trained in treating depression. If he/ she believes you would benefit from seeing one, he/ she will make a referral through a Mental Health Treatment Plan and will recommend the right person for you.

At Vida Psychology we take pride in fostering relationships with GPs. One of our Psychologists has extensive experience in geriatric psychotherapy including treating depression in older adults.

“Your Shared Care Practice: *Working together to support patients and their GPs”*

1/508 Queensberry Street
North Melbourne, Victoria 3051
Phone 03 9328 8200
Fax 03 9328 8711
Email Carmen@vidapsychology.com.au
www.vidapsychology.com.au
ABN 80 161 627 384