

FAST FACTS: Differentiating Pain and Depression

Depression, while it is common in older adults is NOT a normal part of aging. In fact, the majority of older adults are not depressed. The likelihood of developing depression in later life increases as problems with health like decreased mobility and pain, interfere with quality of life. Although everyone feels sad from time to time, to be diagnosed with depression a person must have 5 or more of the symptoms listed for more than 2 weeks. However, following a significant loss like the death of a loved one, or other life change a two-month mourning period is allowed prior to diagnosis of a major depressive episode.

✓ Symptoms of Depression

- Saddened mood most of the day
- Significantly decreased interest in activities
- Difficulty sleeping
- Weight loss or overall decreased appetite
- Increased agitation or restlessness or irritability
- Fatigue
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Decreased ability to concentrate
- Suicidal thoughts or wish for death

Unfortunately unmanaged pain can look very similar to depression in older adults. And, unmanaged pain can contribute to depression. It is important to recognize pain as different from depression in order to target effective treatment.

✓ Symptoms of Unmanaged Pain

- Crying, praying or calling out
- Increased agitation or restlessness or irritability
- Flat affect
- Decreased appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Decreased socialization
- Diminished cognition
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt

✓ What Caregivers can do to help their loved one

- Encourage routine assessment and following of pain treatment plan, this can relieve associated symptoms and improve overall quality of life.
- Write down and share information about your loved ones pain with provider.
- Consider using a Pain Diary to note important information useful to the provider.