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The Empowered Care Partner



Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

Dealing with Depression – Tools for the Care Partner

To acknowledge October as National Depression and Mental Health Awareness Month, we'd like to help by providing education about this condition that lies close to the hearts of all of us at Ceresti, our care partners and loved ones.

Depression

When someone has depression, they may not recognize the symptoms in themselves. Or, they simply may not want to admit that they have symptoms. Perhaps they feel embarrassed or that others may judge them.

What can cause depression?

Depression can be caused by various factors that include:

- Family history (genetic predisposition)
- Hormone imbalances
- Certain medications
- Environmental causes
- Grief
- Being given a major medical diagnosis
- Experiencing physical or emotional abuse
- Living with, or caring for someone who has depression
- Facing constant demands often associated with being a care partner

Life has its ups and downs, so it's natural to have negative feelings that come and go, but negative feelings that last for a period of 2 weeks or longer could be a warning sign of depression.

Unfortunately, many people still see depression as a stigma – a *sign of weakness*, rather than an imbalance. This may be caused by the reactions people have gotten from friends or loved ones when they shared that they are experiencing symptoms. They have heard responses such as, “*it's all in your head*”, or “*snap out of it*” as a way of implying that depression will just go away if the symptoms are ignored or denied – but depression doesn't work that way. No one wants to feel depressed - and if people with the condition could control their symptoms by *pushing them away*, they certainly would.

What are the symptoms of depression?

In general, symptoms are likely to include some or all of the following:

- Feeling numb, hopeless, and sad
- Overwhelming fatigue with little energy or motivation to do anything productive
- Loss of desire to do things that once created joy
- Having a short fuse, easily upset, or agitated
- Feeling like a failure, as if nothing is good enough, poor self-worth
- Changes in sleep habits, getting too much or too little sleep
- Changes in eating habits with unexpected weight loss or gain
- Inability to focus and concentrate – brain fog
- Increase in use of alcohol or drugs, either OTC or prescribed

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- Physical pain, such as back or neck pain, or digestive issues that do not respond to treatment
- Thoughts of running away to escape, or worse, feelings of self-harm or ending one's life

Studies also show that a person caring for a loved one with dementia is twice as likely to develop depression than those caring for people with other medical conditions. These care partners also report more hours of daily care, more problems with employment, chronic stress, poor sleep, less time to do things that are fun, and more family conflict than non-dementia care partners.

Additional depression facts include:

Women experience depression at twice the rate of men.

Women (primarily wives and daughters) are the primary caregivers in most cases. And factors such as PMS, menopause, childbirth, thyroid dysfunction, deficiencies in iron, vitamin D, and Omega-3 fatty acids can all exacerbate symptoms of depression. Worse, a survey showed that up to 41% of women did not report their depression symptoms due to embarrassment, shame, and lack of time to deal.

Men with depression deal with their symptoms differently. They are even less likely to admit their symptoms than women. They are more likely to self-treat by overworking themselves or using alcohol to deal with their symptoms, as they are also less likely to confide in a friend or family member about what they are feeling. Because of the stigma that depression is a sign of weakness, men are also less likely to confide in a friend or family member about their symptoms.

Depression can be caused or exacerbated by lack of sleep.

Sleep is essential to both physical and mental health. Lack of sleep can result in the diminishment of coping skills we need to navigate a challenging day. If you are not able to get your loved one to sleep through the night, it's essential that you find other ways to replenish your own lost sleep. Perhaps you can hire a respite worker, friend, or family member to stay in the house for an hour or two, a few days a week, so you can take a nap in the middle of the day. Or, you can alternate with another family member for overnights so you can get the sleep you need.

What to do if you have depression?

Speak to a qualified healthcare professional. Start with your primary care physician if you need a referral. When you talk to the doctor, be specific about your symptoms and be as honest as possible.

How is depression treated?

Your primary care physician will likely begin with a medical exam to rule out the possibility that your symptoms are being caused by one of your current medications. You will also likely meet with a mental health professional that prescribes medication for depression along with counseling (talk therapy) to help you work through your feelings in a productive way and teach you more effective ways to cope.

Prior to counseling, it is appropriate to get clarification about factors such as cost, how much insurance will pay, and approximately how many sessions you may need to attend.

There are also things you can do to help yourself.

Physical exercise, mindfulness/meditation, journaling, and yoga have all been shown to produce positive effects. *Additional strategies for self-help can include:*

- Breaking larger tasks into small, more doable tasks will help you feel less overwhelmed.
- Find a trusted friend or family member to share and confide with.
- Say **yes** to activities that provide enjoyment, even if you don't feel like going at first. Don't isolate yourself.
- Don't make any important decisions (marriage, divorce, selling a home, etc.) when you are feeling symptomatic
- Readily accept help from friends and family who offer assistance
- Look for classes or support groups in your neighborhood that can help you learn or practice effective problem-solving or coping strategies.

If you believe your loved one needs immediate help, especially if they are thinking about self-harm, call your loved one's doctor or go to a hospital emergency room, or call the 24-hour Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by dialing 988 or 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255). If you have a TTY machine, call 800-799-4TTY (800-799-4889).

In non-emergency situations, your Ceresti coach is also available for support by sending a message on your tablet.

By Marilyn Abrahamson - Brain-Health Education Specialist at Ceresti Health.

For more information about brain health or caregiver support please visit the **Ceresti Brain Health Education portal** at brainhealth.ceresti.com and enter code **GIVECARE**.

SELF-CARE FOR THE CARE PARTNER

FIVE THINGS THAT MAKE PEOPLE HAPPY

The ability to seamlessly cope with life's daily ups and downs is certainly a gift. Unfortunately, it's a skill that we are not all blessed to have. The good news is, we can help ourselves by seeking out things that make us happy.

We are all individuals and enjoy different things, but there are some things that are universal and inspire happiness, in general.

Let's begin with what doesn't make people happy.

We know that feelings of happiness and contentment can come from a combination of sources - positive habits, acceptance of ourselves and the people we care about, setting goals for the future, self-care, just to name a few. Unfortunately, we humans tend to do other things to pass the time or distract ourselves from what we don't want to think about – and it usually includes some type of binge. This might include a binge on food, television, social media or shopping. We may feel like we're enjoying them at the moment, but do they really make us happy?

What makes people genuinely happy?

- **Spending time with the ones we love.** Knowing that there's someone we can rely on in a pinch is a wonderful feeling. Whether it's friends or family, being in the company of people we love is one of the highest forms of happiness.
- **Having something to look forward to:** Whether it's a vacation, an evening out with friends, or achieving a personal or professional goal, having something to look forward to can give us a feeling of purpose. And to be truly happy, we must try our best to live a life with purpose.

- **Giving to or serving others:** Giving and sharing of oneself can offer us true joy. The feeling that we have changed someone's life for the better, even in some small way, is one way to drive that sense of purpose that we all need, and that's what makes us feel that universal sense of happiness.
- **Self-care, staying healthy and fit:** Studies show that when people feel healthy and fit, they feel happier. Engaging in physical exercise releases Serotonin, a feel-good chemical in the brain that naturally makes you feel happier. And doing activities like meditation and yoga make you feel calmer and more balanced, which makes you feel happier as well.
- **Self-acceptance:** The most important aspect of our journey to happiness must be to engage in self-acceptance as all happiness must come from within.

Renowned psychotherapist, Brian Weiss stated, *"When your happiness is dependent on external things or other people, you become vulnerable and can become easily hurt. Never give your power to anyone else."*

Knowing that the true basis of your authentic happiness can only be found within yourself is a beautiful thing - because never again will you rely on the acceptance or opinions of others to color your feelings about yourself and your life.



When Your Loved One's Behavior Seems Different

It's normal for personality and behavior to mature, adjust and change as people get older. Understanding why these changes occur in your loved one can help you determine whether or not you should be concerned.

Behavioral changes in older people tend to result because of a neurological change. You may notice differences in your loved one's personality, judgment, and their ability to make good decisions, just to name a few. There's no way to predict how your loved one will be affected - they may become more boisterous, or more reserved. Cognitive decline, hearing loss, or fatigue may cause them to become more isolated, withdrawn or self-conscious.

What are some common causes of behavioral changes in people as they get older?

- Changes in vision or hearing: These are so common in seniors that they are often overlooked as the possible reason for changes in behavior and personality. When these crucial sensory abilities are lost, it is significantly more difficult to engage with the world. If you notice a change in your loved one's behavior, start by having their vision and hearing tested to see if they are candidates for glasses or hearing aids, or for adjustments of the prescriptions for the ones they already have. There are also adaptive devices such as magnifying glasses to make reading easier and telephones that type out the conversation for them to read.
- Urinary tract infections (UTI): A person with an untreated UTI may experience confusion, forgetfulness, agitation or mood swings. In more severe cases, the symptoms can mimic that of dementia. This is a treatable condition and once provided with the appropriate medical care, your loved one's behavior should return to their baseline.
- Changes in cognition: If your loved one has a gradual decline in cognition, you should not see any major changes in personality or behavior. However, dementia can cause changes that will be noticeable to you in the moment. In fact, most people with dementia do experience personality changes over the course of the condition, which can be difficult to witness. They may experience a range of behavioral changes that can include malaise, mood swings, agitation, anxiety and aggression.
- Side effects of medications: The side effects of certain medications include behavioral changes, and older people do take more medications than

younger adults, as a rule. If your loved one begins to demonstrate changes in personality or behavior shortly after beginning a new medication, the medication could be the cause and the prescribing physician should be contacted immediately. The doctor may be able to offer insight into managing the behaviors, or they may choose to adjust the dose or change the medication altogether to help return your loved one's behavior back to normal.

- Depression: This, and other mental health issues can change the way your loved one sees the world - and themselves. If your loved one is struggling with their mental health, you may notice changes such as anger, agitation, and withdrawal from others. Seek medical attention immediately if your loved one is showing signs of depression, particularly if you suspect they are considering self-harm.
- Stroke: Depending upon where a stroke occurs in the brain, it can have lasting effects on a person's personality and behavior. It can also affect their cognition and communication skills. If you believe your loved one may be having a stroke, seek medical attention immediately as this is a major medical event.

What types of personality and behavioral changes should spark concern?

It's normal for a person to experience slight changes and shifts in personality and behavior, and if your loved one is generally happy and healthy, you probably don't need to worry.

However, these changes should spark concern if they lead to behavior that is harmful or dangerous, or if they affect your loved one's quality of life. In addition, any significant change in personality or behavior that is sudden and without explanation may be the sign of a serious health problem. If this happens, seek medical attention immediately.

Finally, **listen to your gut.** You know your loved one better than anyone, so if you feel uncomfortable or worried, you should err on the side of caution and make an appointment with their primary care physician to discuss your concerns.

If needed, the doctor may be able to provide some insight into why this is happening. They may recommend treatment in the form of medication or counseling to explore why these changes are happening.