

Managing Mental Health with Medicare

If you are a senior who is suffering from depression, you are not alone. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, more than [6.5 million people](#) over the age of 65 experience depression in some form. If you are looking to help yourself — or a senior loved one — break through the barrier of depression, there are several ways that Medicare can help.

MEDICARE - NOT JUST MEDICAL Most people think of Medicare as health insurance for seniors. While this is an accurate description, [Part B](#) also offers a comprehensive listing of services for mental health. When it is time to review your Medicare coverage, ask about mental health benefits such as [psychotherapy and psychiatry](#). Depending on what you anticipate needing, you might find that you have lower out-of-pocket expenses by switching to an Advantage plan.

MANAGE OTHER HEALTH ISSUES Some [medical conditions](#), such as diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, cancer and Parkinson's disease, are known to be related to depression, and, what's worse, depression can negatively impact your treatment for these diseases. In addition, some of the medications prescribed to treat these conditions can contribute to depression. So if you're struggling with depression, especially if you are being treated for another health issue, let your physician know, so he or she can explore alternative medications and other options to help.

SLEEP IT OFF Approximately 10 percent of American adults experience [chronic insomnia](#). And unfortunately, there is a reciprocal relationship between a lack of sleep and depression. If sleep is a struggle, your primary care physician may refer you for a comprehensive sleep study. Medicare [covers this](#) if your doctor suspects sleep-related depression, sleep apnea, or narcolepsy.

EXERCISE IT AWAY A [study published in early 2019](#) indicated that researchers have “for the first time found that physical activity may help fight depression in seniors by stimulating muscle-generated mood boosters.” This is great news for seniors who are able to join a [SilverSneakers](#) exercise program, which are health and fitness programs designed for adults aged 65 and up. Many Medicare plans include SilverSneakers programs.

5 Common Symptoms of Depression

Depression is not always easy to spot. If you or your loved one experience any of the following symptoms, it's time to open up a conversation with a health care provider.

Insomnia. People with depression often report having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. When this happens more than occasionally, it might indicate depression.

Sudden apathy. Many older adults exhibit signs of depression that look a lot like dementia. This includes apathy and a sudden loss of interest in formerly important things.

Irritability. A short temper is often a general character trait. When it is not, your senior loved one may be agitated not because of outside factors but because of undiagnosed depression.

Weight loss or weight gain. Most healthy seniors maintain a consistent weight. Although gaining a few pounds does offer some protective benefits, excessive weight gain or weight loss might indicate over or under-eating as a coping mechanism for depression.

Talk of despair. Untreated depression can lead to feelings of worthlessness, low self-esteem, and suicidal tendencies. If you notice yourself or someone you love focusing on negatives — death, violence, lost loved ones — immediately reach out and seek help. If you have thoughts of suicide, visit the emergency room for expedient treatment.

If you or your senior loved one experience symptoms of depression, contact a qualified health care professional. And know that you are not alone. Your blue-and-white Medicare card can stand by your side as you reclaim your life.

If you live in a life plan community, such as [Aldersgate Village](#), you can count on your friends and neighbors for loving support, [spiritual counseling](#), [senior-friendly fitness classes](#), and on-site clinics for medical and psychological care. [Complete our online form](#) to learn more.