

Caring for Seniors' Mental Health

Social activity is a basic need with health benefits for people of all ages. As they age, seniors face lifestyle changes that can make regular socializing harder. This can lead to weakened social skills and withdrawal from social spaces, which in turn increases risks to their mental and physical health.

Support and encourage the seniors in your life to engage in social activities

Socially isolated seniors have a higher risk for dementia, cognitive impairments, and overall health declines. A senior's caregivers and loved ones can help protect the senior's mental health by learning to recognize and prevent social isolation.

The facts of senior's mental health

- 25% of seniors live with anxiety, depression, or other mental illness.
- 10% to 15% of seniors aged 65+ who live independently struggle with depression.
- 44% of seniors in residential care show symptoms of depression.
- 40% of seniors who experience a stroke also experience major depression.
- Seniors aged 65+ have the highest rate of hospitalization for anxiety disorders.
- Men age 80+ have the highest suicide rate of all age groups.

What is cognitive aging?

Cognitive aging describes mental processes that change with age.

These include memory, organization, multi-tasking, and finding the right words when speaking.

Aging can slow down and muddle these processes. Seniors may find it harder to remember the names of new acquaintances, or they may get overwhelmed at organizational tasks like keeping a calendar.

Socializing and cognitive aging

Social engagement and having a large social network can reduce the risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, and other cognitive impairments.

Regular social connection also leads to better sleeping habits, lower blood pressure, improved immunity, and better overall fitness. Seniors with strong social connections consume less alcohol and have a lower risk of falls, better nutrition, and fewer hospital visits. They are also at less risk of being abused.

Helping a senior stay involved

Provide Support

- Learn about helpful resources in your community through your Community Seniors Resource Guide.
- Hone your listening skills. Find resources that can help you talk to loved ones and others affected by aging.
- Talking about aging is unlikely to make seniors upset. They will more likely appreciate the chance to discuss their problems.
- Identify signs of potential isolation or risks to health.



Encourage Regular Participation

- Help older adults to build their social network and create a sense of community.
- Check out your Community Seniors Guide for activities that may be of interest.
- Encourage walking with a companion or participation in a walking program.

Help Seniors Feel Connected and Valued

- Help older adults find information, programs and services to help them feel included and to meet their basic social needs.
- Support older adults in finding meaningful social connections

Encourage Activities to Improve and Maintain Cognition

- Stimulate older adults' interest in enjoyable mental activities like socializing, crossword puzzles, reading, Sudoku and playing cards.
- Encourage seniors to talk about cognitive changes with others - friends and family members may have great suggestions for strategies.

Regular social interaction is integral to good overall health.

Regular contact with friends and family can help seniors feel connected

Walking groups, movie nights, or other regular gatherings can offer practice for social skills and something to look forward to. Programs, workshops, and classes can help a senior feel more involved in community.

Jan 9, 2018