

The background of the slide features an abstract design of overlapping, semi-transparent blue triangles and polygons in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to a deep navy blue. The shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, primarily concentrated on the right side of the slide.

Depression and Anxiety in Older Adults

Pam Foster, LPC, LADC
Options Counseling Service, Inc.

Mental Health and Older Adults

- ▶ The world's population is aging rapidly.
- ▶ An estimated 20% of people age 55 or older experience some kind of mental health concern. (Center for Disease Control)
- ▶ A small percentage, only 1 in 3, of older adults seek mental health treatment.

The Baby Boomer generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, are the largest generation in U.S. history. The majority of them are currently over 55 years old.

Between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population of individuals over the age of 60 will almost double from 12% to 22% which translates to approximately 900 million to 2 billion people.

Many of the older adults today grew up in a time when mental health problems were not well understood and were sometimes not recognized as legitimate health concerns. Mental health is as important in older age as it is at any other time of life. However, a small percentage of this population seek mental health treatment.

Mental Health is essential to overall health. The World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Mental health must be treated with the same urgency as physical health in all people, including older adults.

Risk Factors for Mental Health Concerns in Older Adults

- ▶ Bereavement
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Change in socioeconomic status
- ▶ Change in environment
- ▶ Chronic health issues
- ▶ Chronic pain
- ▶ Decline in functional ability
- ▶ Transition to retirement
- ▶ Poor diet and nutrition
- ▶ Alcohol or substance abuse

People of all ages are prone to mental health concerns. There are some life events that may lead to the older adult being more vulnerable to depression or anxiety.

As we age we experience the deaths of family and friends. The repeated exposure to death, dying, and the grieving process can make us more vulnerable to mental health concerns.

Our social network sometimes gets smaller as we age. This may be due to attrition or to a lack of mobility or ability by some other means. Adequate social and emotional support is associated with a reduced risk of mental illness.

Aging brings about changes: change in environment (moving closer to family, downsizing), socioeconomic status, retirement, and health and function decline. These changes can make us vulnerable to mental health issues.

Poor nutrition, inadequate sleep, and alcohol or substance abuse put people at higher risk for mental health issues, no matter what age.

Depression and Older Adults

- ▶ Rate of depression in older adults tends to increase with age.
- ▶ Most prevalent mental health problem in older adults.
- ▶ Depression is more than feeling sad, lonely or stressed. These are normal reactions to certain life events.
- ▶ Depression:
 - ▶ is a persistent feeling of sadness and/or irritability.
 - ▶ interferes with a person's motivation and drive.
 - ▶ can cause disruption in sleeping and eating patterns.
 - ▶ makes things that were once enjoyable no longer pleasurable.

Depression is a mood disorder and the most prevalent mental health concern in older adults.

Fluctuation of mood is a normal part of life. Depression is more than sadness. When we are sad, we are still able to experience joy. Depression is persistent, disruptive, and interferes with functioning and experiencing joy.

Depression and Older Adults

- ▶ Symptoms of Depression in Older Adults may look different:
 - ▶ Feeling tired
 - ▶ Feeling grumpy or irritable
 - ▶ Trouble sleeping
 - ▶ Confusion
 - ▶ Attention problems
 - ▶ Social withdrawal
 - ▶ Physical problem with no biological explanation (aches, pain, constipation, etc.)

Symptoms of depression can vary. An individual may experience persistent sadness and/or irritability. A lack of appetite or over eating can also be symptoms. Individuals may have trouble with insomnia or may sleep too much. Confusion and decision making are effected. Depression can also physically hurt. We may feel almost flu like symptoms with achiness and pain.

When we are depressed we tend to withdraw from people. It is just too exhausting to act like everything is okay.

Treating Depression - Challenges

- ▶ Mental health concerns viewed as “weakness”
- ▶ Symptoms often overlooked due to co-occurring physical health issues
- ▶ Older adults are less likely to discuss mental health concerns
- ▶ Older adults less likely to seek the help of a mental health professional

Seeking help for problems with mental health still has a negative connotation among people of all ages, but especially with generations who grew up not talking about mental health issues. For some, mental health problems are still viewed as a weakness that can be resolved with the appropriate amount of will power. For this reason, older adults are less likely to seek mental health treatment. When they do seek help, they are more likely to talk to their primary care physician rather than a mental health professional. Focus is more likely to be on physical symptoms rather than emotional ones. Symptoms of mental health concerns can often be overlooked due to other physical concerns that are present.

Anxiety and Older Adults

- ▶ Among the most prevalent mental health concerns in older adults.
- ▶ Often co-occurs with depression
- ▶ Not a normal part of aging.
- ▶ As common among older adults as it is in younger adults.
- ▶ Generalized Anxiety Disorder most common anxiety disorder among older adults.

Anxiety is a prevalent mental health concern in older adults. It often co-occurs with depression. Sometimes anxiety is treated because it has more overt symptoms and the depression goes untreated. Anxiety is not a normal part of aging. It is not more common in older adults. It is as common in older adults as it is in younger adults. There are many different anxiety disorders. Generalized Anxiety Disorder seems to be the most common among older adults.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is defined as excessive anxiety and worry, which the individual has a difficult time controlling, about a number of events or activities.

Anxiety and Older Adults

- ▶ Behavioral Symptoms of Anxiety
 - ▶ Avoiding situation or objects which cause fear or worry
 - ▶ Being startled easily
 - ▶ Difficulty making decisions
- ▶ Emotional Symptoms of Anxiety
 - ▶ Persistent feeling of dread
 - ▶ Feeling overwhelmed
 - ▶ Feeling on edge, nervous, jittery, or tense
 - ▶ Persistent worry

There can be many and varying symptoms of anxiety. Symptoms can effect a person behaviorally, emotionally, and physically

Anxiety and Older Adults

- ▶ Physical Symptoms of Anxiety
 - ▶ Increased heart rate
 - ▶ Shortness of breath
 - ▶ Nausea or stomach pain
 - ▶ Dizziness, lightheaded
 - ▶ Muscle tension
 - ▶ Numbness, tingling
 - ▶ Difficulty sleeping

Physical symptoms often are the scariest for an individual. Individuals with anxiety often mistake the physical symptoms as symptoms of an actual physical problem, usually concerning the heart.

Symptoms of anxiety tend to be more noticeable and uncomfortable for an individual and they are therefore more likely to seek treatment. However, there are challenges.

Treating Anxiety - Challenges

- ▶ Many of the same challenges as treating depression
 - ▶ Mental health concerns viewed as “weakness”
 - ▶ Symptoms often overlooked due to co-occurring physical health issues
 - ▶ Older adults are less likely to discuss mental health concerns
 - ▶ Older adults less likely to seek the help of a mental health professional
- ▶ Often overlooked as focus is on the physical symptoms of anxiety being a physical issue.

Many of the challenges to treating depression are also present in the treatment of anxiety.

As mentioned earlier, physical symptoms are often mistaken as an actual physical problem. The psychological issue of anxiety is often missed due to focus being on the physical symptoms alone.

Treating Depression and Anxiety

- ▶ Medications available
- ▶ Over the counter natural options
- ▶ Psychotherapy a/k/a Talk Therapy
 - ▶ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - focuses on negative thinking
- ▶ Exercise
- ▶ Eating healthy
- ▶ Getting outside in the sun
- ▶ Adequate sleep

There are several treatment options for anxiety and depression. Treatment for both conditions is similar.

Anti-depressants are often used to treat both depression and anxiety. Some anti-depressants work well for both.

Anti-anxiety medications are used more sparingly. Xanax was a popular medication for anxiety for some time. It is being used less and less now as it is habit forming.

There are natural supplements that can be purchased over the counter that can help reduce anxiety (L-Theanine) and depression (5Htp, SamE).

*****IT IS CRUCIAL TO CONSULT WITH YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE ADDING A MEDICATION, EVEN OVER THE COUNTER SUPPLEMENTS, TO YOUR CURRENT MEDICATION ROUTINE.**

As we age our metabolism changes which means the rate at which we metabolize substances slows. It is important to consult with your physician before making any changes to your medication routine.

Psychotherapy is an important piece of treatment. Research has shown that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a very effective treatment modality for both depression and

anxiety. CBT focuses on our thinking as playing a role in how we feel and what we do.

Good eating and sleeping habits are helpful as well as being active and getting fresh air and sunshine.

Preventing Depression and Anxiety

- ▶ Support network
- ▶ Regular exercise
- ▶ Eating healthy
- ▶ Adequate sleep
- ▶ Having a hobby
- ▶ Balanced life
- ▶ Avoid alcohol and other substances

Prevention is key. There are things we can do today to help ward off symptoms of depression and anxiety in the future.

Having a good support network is important. Having adequate social and emotional support can reduce the risk of depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns.

Take care of your body by eating a healthy, well-balanced diet and exercise. Being outside in the fresh air and sunshine boosts the mood. Get plenty of sleep. The importance of adequate sleep is often disregarded. Our bodies and minds need that down time to regenerate.

Having a hobby or activity you get pleasure from helps prevent depression and anxiety. Do something you enjoy with people you enjoy.

Trim a hectic schedule to its most essential items. It is okay to take time out for yourself every day. Many individuals have a difficult time saying “no”. We focus on the negativity of a no answer. With every no, there is a yes. When the answer to one thing is no, it usually means we are saying yes to something else. That “something” else can be you. Saying yes to you enables you to say yes to others and maintain your own mental health.