

Caregiver Assistance News

"CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS"

Mental Health/Depression

Depression Triggers

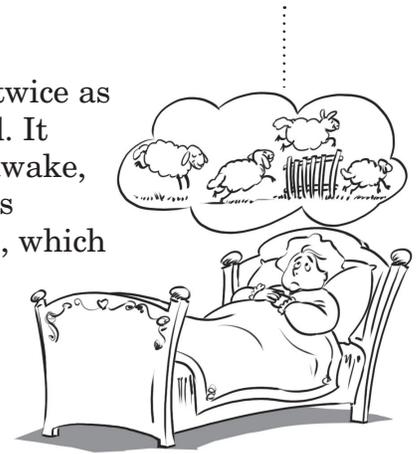
Because many older adults often deal with heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer and Parkinson's disease, and because depression can occur *with* these illnesses, some health care professionals may mistakenly think that depression is a *normal* for the elderly. Depression *can* and *should* be treated when it occurs with other illnesses, since untreated depression can delay recovery or worsen outcomes. And because symptoms of depression displayed by older people may look different from those in younger people, seniors are often *under-treated* for depression and other mental health problems.

Many older adults may be ashamed to admit when they feel "blue," thinking that it is a sign of weakness or failure. Clinical depression is not a failing; it is a illness. And mental illnesses are simply disorders that require treatment. We need to reassure the ones we care for that it is OK to feel down. Older adults need opportunities to express feelings such as anxiety, depression, frustration or grief, and receive recognition that these feelings are normal and valid.

Insomnia: Sleep On It

One of the newest discoveries about treating depression is that treating sleep disorders, like insomnia, helps people feel less depressed. Nearly half of all people with depression report trouble sleeping, and people with

insomnia are nearly twice as likely to be depressed. It makes sense: Lying awake, unable to sleep makes problems seem worse, which makes depression worse. **Curing insomnia in people with depression could double their chance of a full recovery.**



The best insomnia cures don't involve taking drugs; recent research shows that a form of treatment called "cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia" works best by teaching the person to establish a regular wake-up time and stick to it; get out of bed during waking periods; avoid eating, reading, watching TV or similar activities in bed; and eliminate daytime napping.

About the worst thing a sleepless person can do is drink alcohol. Although it makes you feel sleepy, alcohol leaves you feeling groggy and unrested when you wake up in the morning. A person with severe insomnia needs a doctor's help; for the occasional sleepless night, try a warm bath before bed, a massage, warm milk or a soothing non-caffeinated beverage (other than alcohol!). Bedrooms should be slightly cooler than the rest of the house, dark, and quiet.

Source: *New York Times*

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Seniors who make positive changes to their substance use patterns—like quitting smoking or cutting down on alcohol—feel happier and healthier.

Alcohol abuse and depression go hand in hand, especially in older people. Once a person is past the age of 40, the effects of even moderate alcohol use are a lot worse. As we age, we lose muscle mass (which helps to burn off alcohol), our livers become less efficient (which slows how the body metabolizes alcohol), and we tend to be a bit dehydrated (which makes our bodies take a longer time to get rid of alcohol). Also, older people tend to take more medications—both prescription and over-the-counter—which increases the chances of dangerous alcohol-drug interactions. Levels of a substance which breaks down alcohol in body, tend to be lower in older people too. **All this means that older people feel the effects of**



alcohol more and for a longer period than younger people.

Doctors become concerned when people drink more than a *moderate* amount of alcohol: **up to two drinks per day for men and up to one drink per day for women** (one drink is about 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of liquor). Excessive alcohol consumption increases the risks of liver disease, stroke, high blood pressure, certain types of cancer and dementia, as well as accidents and injuries.

Source: CDC; Wall Street Journal, Drinking after 40.



Resource for You

The Center for Mental Health Services

(800) 789-2647 www.mentalhealth.gov

Provides information about mental health.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

(800) 273-TALK (8255) www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

A free and confidential, 24/7 hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

Alcoholics Anonymous

Visit www.aa.org to find a meeting near you to help recover from alcoholism.

Taking Care of Yourself—Control Your Reactions

When you are frustrated, it is important to know what is and what is not within your power to change. Frustration often comes when we try to change something that can't be changed. We can't change the fact that the person we care for has dementia. And the person with dementia cannot change the fact that normal daily activities—dressing, bathing and eating—are now very difficult. The only thing you can control is your reaction:

- recognize the warnings signs of frustration;
- calm yourself down physically;
- change your thoughts in a way that reduces your stress;
- communicate assertively and ask for help.

Source: Family Caregiver Alliance



Anger Making Your Blood Boil?

Anger accounts for about 30,000 heart attacks a year in the US. Those prone to anger are also more likely to have strokes. Cool down, relax, and keep life in perspective. It might save your life.

Source: Harvard Health Letter

Live Life Laughing!

"Me? I sleep like a baby. I wake up every two hours and cry."



Inspiration

Resenting someone is a way of never leaving them.

Don't Fall - Be Safe

Antidepressant medication is the number one drug associated with falls in the elderly. This is because many of these drugs have strong sedative properties and can make people clumsy.

Source: Archives of Internal Medicine

The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

Ordering Info

From the publishers of

The Comfort of Home®
Caregiver Series

available from...

CareTrust Publications LLC
PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296
800-565-1533
or www.comfortofhome.com

Comments and suggestions welcome.

©2014 CareTrust Publications LLC.

All rights reserved. Reproduction of any component of this publication is forbidden without a license from the publisher.

Some content in this publication is excerpted from *The Comfort of Home: Caregivers Series*. It is for informational use and not health advice. It is not meant to replace medical care but to supplement it. The publisher assumes no liability with respect to the accuracy, completeness or application of information presented or the reader's misunderstanding of the text.

SAFETY TIPS—Mixing Drugs and Alcohol

Alcohol-drug interactions are dangerous. Because alcohol and many medications are processed by the liver, this can enhance the effects of alcohol or the medications. Some examples are:

- Heartburn drugs like Zantac interfere with the metabolism of alcohol and raise blood-alcohol levels.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol), when combined with alcohol, can damage the liver.
- Mixing alcohol with blood thinners like Coumadin can cause dangerous bleeding.
- Taking alcohol with some pain medications and anti-anxiety drugs can make a person overly sleepy, more likely to have heart problems, and, most important, more likely to overdose.
- Long-term alcohol use can raise blood pressure.
- Alcohol tends to irritate the stomach.

If you're not sure if a medication can be combined with alcohol, avoid any alcohol consumption until your doctor or pharmacist has told you that it's safe to mix the two.

Source: CDC; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

NEXT ISSUE... ELDER ABUSE/NEGLECT