

Tips for Helping an Elderly Depressed Person

It is possible to actively improve the quality of life for an elderly person suffering from depression.

List of suggestions to assist in fostering a more healthy life for an elderly depressed person:

- **Make certain that professional treatment is sought.** Identifying depression and treating it appropriately is sometimes the key to breaking the depression cycle, and a necessary first step.
- **Encourage the person to follow through with treatment.** Depression usually reoccurs when treatment is stopped too soon. If the prescribed treatment isn't helping, look into other medications and therapies, or even other professionals. There are few trained geriatricians and sometimes physicians suffer from ageism, as do other professionals. Neither depression nor dementia is a normal component of aging.
- **Invite the person out.** Depression is less likely when a person's body and mind remain active. Suggest activities the person used to enjoy: walks, an art class, a trip to the museum or the movies—anything that provides mental or physical stimulation.
- **Schedule regular social activities.** Group outings, visits from friends and family members or trips to the local senior or community center can help combat isolation and loneliness. Be gently insistent if the suggested plans are refused: depressed people often feel better when they're around others, but they may need some encouragement to get there.
- **Plan and prepare healthy meals,** or see to it that the depressed person has balanced meals available and is actually eating those meals. A poor diet can make depression worse. Every meal should include plenty of fruit, vegetables, whole grains and some protein.
- **Ensure all medications are taken as instructed.** There are many types of medical reminder devices, including electronic devices that actually beep if medications are missed. Remind the person to obey doctor's orders about the use of alcohol while on medication. Help the person remember when to take prescribed doses, or assist in getting a device in place that works.
- **Watch for suicide warning signs,** which include feeling hopeless or trapped, withdrawing from family and friends, experiencing dramatic mood changes, and talking or writing about death, dying or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person. Seek immediate professional help if it is suspected that the person is thinking about suicide. Time is of the essence.

Help Guide: www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_elderly.htm

