

## Fitness for the mind

by *Kimberley Wilson, PhD (c), MSW*

One in five Canadians will face the challenge of mental illness at some point in their lifetime. And with some mental illnesses, age can increase risk.

Yet older adults are less likely to receive treatment for their mental illness. Sometimes this is because people don't understand what is 'typical aging' and what is not. Many people still believe that it is a normal part of aging when a person goes through significant changes in mood and behaviour. This simply isn't true.

In fact, changes in mood and behaviour can be caused by illnesses such as depression, delirium, or dementia. They should be attended to by a health care professional.

### What is depression?

Clinical depression is a mental illness. It is more than having a bad day or feeling 'blue' for a short time. A diagnosis of depression means that a person has had some, or all, of these symptoms for at least two weeks:

- ☞ Feeling sad
- ☞ No interest in or pleasure from things they used to enjoy
- ☞ Less energy and feeling tired
- ☞ Having aches and pains
- ☞ Feeling guilty or worthless
- ☞ Difficulties thinking and concentrating
- ☞ Problems sleeping
- ☞ Changes in appetite or weight
- ☞ Feeling agitated or sluggish
- ☞ Having thoughts of suicide

For most people, depression does not get better on its own. Talk to your healthcare provider.



### Building your mental health

It's important to know the warning signs, but it's just as important to promote your own mental health. Here are ten tips for living and aging well:

1. Eat healthy foods in healthy amounts.
2. Be physically and mentally healthy.
3. Get rest.
4. Manage your stress.
5. Don't smoke.
6. Drink alcohol only in moderation.
7. Get involved with things that interest you.
8. Spend time with people – family, friends, and members of your community.
9. Follow the advice of your health care team.
10. Ask for help when you need it.

### Maintaining your mental health as a caregiver

If you are a family caregiver, caring for yourself is one of the most important things you can do. Use these tips to stay physically and mentally healthy. When your needs are taken care of, the person you care for will benefit too.

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