



Identifying Geriatric Depression and Anxiety

By Michael Pries, PhD

We all have up days and down ones. Some days we have more hope and optimism than others. At other times, we are filled with fear and worry. These fluctuations in mood, when short-lived, are normal and part of all of our experience. Sometimes, events in our lives can upset our emotional stability and severe depression and/or anxiety problems may develop.

Signs and Symptoms of depression:

- Agitation or irritability
- Feeling “down” or “blue”
- Loss of interest in pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite: Eating more or less
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Agitated movements or slow movements
- Lack of energy
- Feelings of worthless or guilty
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Social withdrawal and isolation

Depression and anxiety are “whole-body” illnesses, involving body, mood and thoughts. They affect the way we eat and sleep, the way we feel about ourselves and the way we think about things. Anxiety and depression will not go away by themselves. They are not a sign of personal weakness, nor are they conditions that can be willed or wished away. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months or years and may make physical illness more likely and more severe. Appropriate treatment can help over 80% of those who suffer from these debilitating disorders.

Signs and Symptoms of anxiety:

- Feeling panic/fear
- Trouble sleeping/insomnia
- Lack of concentration
- Changes in appetite
- Fixation upon physical symptoms
- Obsessive thinking/repetitive talk
- Increased alcohol, drug or prescribed medication use
- Combative behavior
- Increased marital/family discord

Treatment for depression and anxiety disorders are best addressed cooperatively by the individual, their family, physician and counselor. Appropriate medication may be prescribed and their effects monitored. Our counseling involves an individualized combination of 1) encouraging increased purposeful activity, 2) teaching ways to identify and correct negative thinking patterns and 3) helping to improve interpersonal relationships. Treatment is usually short-termed lasting from 8-16 weeks.

Do not wait to seek assistance; depression and anxiety are treatable.