

## Deliver Us From Our Depression

Contrary to popular opinion, depression is not a "normal" part of aging. According to a number of studies however, it does appear to be an increasingly common "side effect" of caregiving.

Check out these statistics from the *Family Caregiving and Public Policy Principles of Change*:

- Family caregivers who provide 36 or more hours of care per week are more likely than non-caregivers to experience symptoms of depression or anxiety. For spouses, the rate is six times higher; for those caring for parents, the rate is twice as high as non-caregivers.
- Caregivers use prescription drugs for depression, anxiety and insomnia two to three times as often as the rest of the population.
- The stress of intense family caregiving for persons with dementia has been shown to impact a person's immune system both in terms of increased chances of developing a chronic illness and in significantly slow wound healing.

And, according to a study at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, loved ones in a long-term care facility get no relief from depression and anxiety, and, in fact, experience additional emotional trauma after placement.

There's a lot more to depression than feeling sad.

It could be more than just a case of "the blue" if you have or if someone you love has experienced any of the following symptoms for more than two weeks:

- feeling emotionally "drained" or exhausted
- lacking energy; feeling tired all the time, or exhausted even after a good night's sleep
- sleep disturbances - having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- eating problems - lack of appetite; weight loss; or eating too much
- feelings of sadness and hopelessness, thinking "what's the use in trying?"
- loss of pleasure in activities that used to bring joy and pleasure
- irritability/anger/impatience with yourself and others; criticizing or complaining about others; dwelling on past hurts or injustices

- withdrawal/isolation - staying away from church, family gatherings, club meetings, socializing with others, and making excuses because you're "just not in the mood" or going out just takes too much planning and effort
- chronic complaining - nothing is right; seeing the glass as half-empty rather than half-full; seeing the world through gray rather than rose-colored glasses
- miscellaneous aches and pains
- feelings of grief and loss - over lost or strained relationships; loss of health; deaths or illnesses of loved ones

What's the answer? Seek help when you need it. October is National Depression Education and Awareness Month. October 8<sup>th</sup> is National Depression Screening Day, when a number of local hospitals offer information on and free screenings for depression.

According to Dr. Mark D. Miller, author of the book *Living Longer Depression Free*, "most people perceive depression as something you can 'get over,' but it is a debilitating illness. Once it gets hold of you, it can be as fatal as pneumonia. You can look physically normal, but it's not something you can snap yourself out of."