

# Senior Health

## Helping Prevent Depression In Older Adults

(NAPSA)—There are steps that families and friends can take to help older people overcome an all-too-common problem.

According to experts, the incidence of depression among nursing home residents may be as high as 50 percent. It is important for the people who care for them to identify the signs and symptoms of depression.

Depression is not a normal part of aging and it can be serious. For example, depression can reduce an older adult's quality of life and make other health problems worse. Suicide rates among the elderly are some of the highest in the nation, and women are more likely to experience depression than men. Additionally, older women are at an even higher risk of experiencing depression because they live longer.

The symptoms of depression include low mood or loss of pleasure or fun that has lasted longer than two weeks and at least one of the following symptoms: trouble sleeping, loss of interest, guilt, lack of energy, trouble concentrating, poor appetite, or thoughts of suicide.

The Older Women's League (OWL) is working with the National Network of Career Nursing Assistants to teach nursing assistants the common symptoms of depression, how they can help prevent and alleviate depression and how to talk about referring older adults for a complete assessment. Working in a variety of settings such as nursing homes, nurse's aides have daily contact with older adults.

"Women are more than twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with depression, and middle-aged Hispanic or African-American women are at an even higher risk; therefore, it is imperative that we teach



**Spending time with older adults, especially those in care facilities, can help prevent depression—and cheer you up, too.**

Americans that mental illnesses among the middle aged and elderly are real, common and very treatable," says Ashley Carson, Executive Director of OWL.

These organizations are quick to point out that older adults can still engage in interests and activities, even with reduced mobility or abilities. For example, if they can't read for long, they may listen to a book on tape. If they can't travel, they can watch travel and nature videos. Most importantly, however, are warm, respectful social connections. At any age, most people like to connect, to share, to engage in conversation, make new friends and pursue old interests. With the right help, they still can.

"Research shows that social connections are an important predictor of long-term well-being," says Peter Lichtenberg, professor of gerontology and psychology at Wayne State University and a partner in OWL's project to educate nursing assistants about ways they can reduce depression. This project is supported by the American Psychological Foundation and Wyeth.

To learn more, visit the Web site at [www.owl-national.org](http://www.owl-national.org).