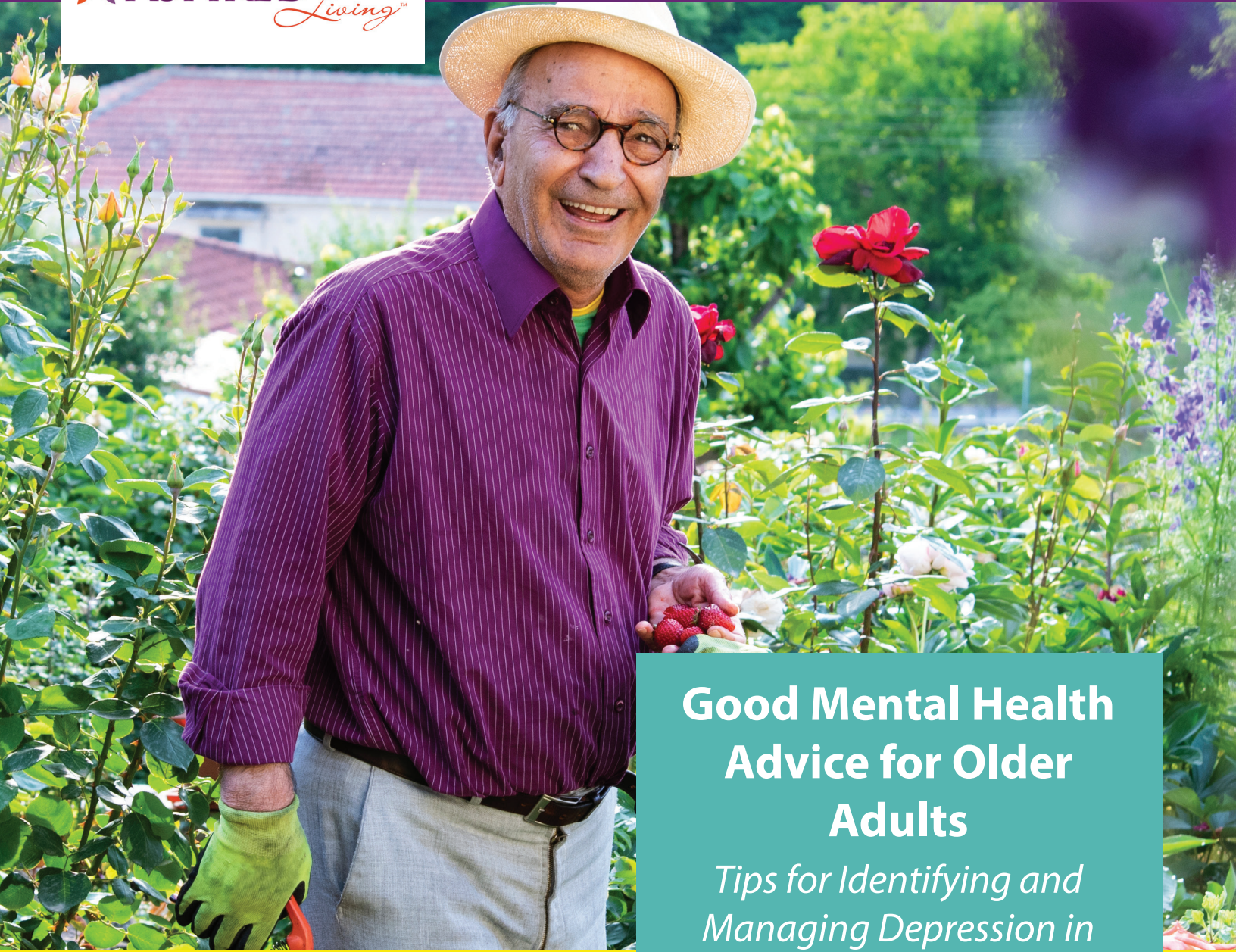


Identifying and Managing Depression



Good Mental Health Advice for Older Adults

Tips for Identifying and Managing Depression in Challenging Times

Handling **The Blues**

Life's ups and downs bring happy days and sad days. Unfortunately, complications from chronic health conditions, loss of loved ones and other age-related challenges can make it feel like the lows sometimes outnumber the highs, especially in one's later years.

These days those lows can be further compounded by the necessity to isolate due to COVID-19, which makes it harder than ever for young and old alike to look on the bright side and keep spirits up.

The good news is that most older adults have lived through and survived tough times. They are resilient, strong and experienced at adapting to change.

It is perfectly normal to experience "the blues" every now and then, but prolonged depression is not a normal part of aging. Depression is a true medical condition that is treatable, like diabetes or hypertension, and should be addressed as such at any age.

How do I know if it is depression?

Someone who is depressed has feelings of sadness and anxiety that last for several days or weeks at a time.

The *National Institute of Mental Health* lists the following warning signs of depression:

- Noticeable changes in mood, energy levels or appetite
- Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Difficulty concentrating, feeling restless or on edge
- Increase worry or feeling stressed
- Anger, irritability, or aggressiveness
- Ongoing headaches, digestive issues, or pain
- A need for alcohol or drugs
- Sadness or hopelessness

- Suicidal thoughts
- Engaging in high-risk activities
- Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior
- Thoughts or behaviors that interfere with family or social life
- Unusual thinking or behaviors that concern other people

If you suspect that you or a loved one are depressed, reach out to a family member for help or schedule an appointment with a healthcare provider. The proper medical treatment can relieve symptoms and lead to better mental health.

How can I improve my mental health?

Make taking care of yourself – mind, body and spirit – a top priority, so you can enjoy life to the fullest. The following tips are not expensive or difficult to follow, but they can bring about real, positive changes in how one feels and approaches life.

Cope with Change – Aging and time can bring major lifestyle changes. Try to roll with the changes, knowing that while you cannot always control what happens, you can control how you respond.

Stay Connected – Family and friends can be your own best cheerleaders and greatest sources of strength and joy. Attend family gatherings and grandchildren's events, whenever possible. Meanwhile, keep in touch with the help of technology by scheduling phone calls, sending emails, or video chatting via Zoom, Skype or FaceTime.

Talk About Your Feelings – Sharing your true feelings with family and friends is not a sign a weakness and can go a long way toward making you feel supported and less alone.

Be Physically Active – Take a walk, stretch, do yoga or tai chi, or simply dance! Exercise has physical and mental benefits such as improved mood and better sleep.

Exercise Your Brain – Stimulate your brain by attending lifelong learning programs (in person or online), doing crossword, jigsaw or Sudoku puzzles and playing trivia and card games with friends.

Eat Well – Following a nutritiously balanced diet can help you look and feel better, so eat your fruits and veggies!

Do Something You Enjoy – Concentrating on a hobby that you know and love, such as gardening, painting or woodworking, can help you forget about your worries for a while and improve your mood while boosting self-esteem too.

Make a Difference – Giving back to others can add meaning and purpose to your life. Find the form of volunteering that suits your talent and passion – from reading to children to collecting food to knitting baby hats and blankets.

Adopt a Pet – Being responsible for a furry or feathered friend can make you more socially engaged, less depressed and less stressed.

Ask for Help – Do not try and be a superhuman! When you feel down or overwhelmed, reach out to a family member, friend, caregiver, pastor, or doctor for friendly, practical advice on how to cope.

Follow Doctor's Orders – If you are under a physician's care for a physical and/or mental condition, take prescribed medication, attend scheduled appointments and follow the doctor's orders for your own wellbeing.

Disclaimer: *The medical information provided is for informational and educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice.*

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