

# Caregiver Assistance News

*“Caring for You - Caring for Others”*

**Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.**

*Serving Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike,  
Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties in Ohio*

**www.aaa7.org** **Helping You Age Better!**



**MAY 2016**

## **Depression and Nutrition**

### **What You Eat Matters**

Aging is a normal, physical process. Aside from the many physical changes that evolve, various emotional and mental changes also occur. We often associate dementia with aging, but older adults may also experience other mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, paranoia, and substance abuse.

The emotional and mental challenges in older adults are often related to difficulties with adjusting to physical changes or poor health, as well as other issues such as loneliness, retirement, loss of independence, having to live away from family, or death of a spouse. Older adults may also be unable to express their fear of death or fear of being alone. Sometimes, family members and caregivers are not able to recognize these fears and may mistake them as signs of dementia.



As a caregiver, you can help an older adult deal with these challenges in many ways. You can begin by changing your own attitude toward their disabilities and focus more on their abilities. For instance, instead of focusing on what they cannot do, point out their strengths and affirm their accomplishments. Allow them to make more choices to give them a greater sense of control. It is also helpful to use a bit more humor in your conversations when appropriate.

### **Nutrition and Mental Health**

According to the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), depression is the second cause of disability among the elderly, after heart disease. Research shows that one of the factors that increases a person's risk for depression is poor nutrition.

Good nutrition is not only good for physical health – it is also important for mental health. Eating a healthy, balanced diet can help protect the body from diseases and prevent mental health disorders as well. How? Turn the page to find out!

***(continued on Page 1)***

## ***Depression*** (continued from Page 1)

Why is good nutrition important?

1. It supports brain function by providing building blocks for cell growth and enhancing the production of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters.
2. It supports communication between brain cells.
3. It promotes a healthy environment in the gut by increasing the amount of friendly bacteria, which helps reduce inflammation and increases brain-healthy vitamin B production.

To improve nutrition, avoid eating junk food and anything that is high in sugar, salt or fat. Instead, look for foods that are high in protein, complex carbohydrates, and healthy fats.

### **Food for the Brain**

Choosing the right type of foods to include in the diet is key to maintaining mental health. While we usually think of food as nourishment for the body, certain nutrients actually benefit the brain by helping to improve memory, mental ability and moods. Here are some examples:

- Foods rich in B-vitamins such as lean meat, eggs, fruits and vegetables can help reduce inflammation and prevent dementia and depression.
- Iron-rich foods like chicken, liver, and eggs increase oxygen delivery to the brain and may help improve alertness and memory.
- Health fats like omega-3 fatty acids from sardines, salmon and tuna reduce inflammation, enhance blood circulation, and improve mental function.
- Micronutrients like zinc and selenium, which are found in oyster, dark chocolate and sesame seeds, help control your body's response to stress.
- Probiotics are foods with good bacteria such as yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, and kimchi, which may help reduce anxiety, stress, and depression.

Talk to a nutritionist about what foods you should eat, and not only those that you should avoid. Although a healthy diet may not be able to replace your medications, it will support your overall treatment plan and possibly bring better results than relying on medications alone.

Source: [www.webmd.com/mental-health](http://www.webmd.com/mental-health); CDC

## **Community Wellness Classes**

*brought to you by the Area Agency on Aging District 7*

**Chronic Disease Self-Management • Diabetes Self-Management**

**A Matter of Balance Falls Prevention • Tools for Caregivers**

*Classes available throughout our ten-county district in 2016. Contact us to learn more about these FREE classes and when we will be in your area!*

**1-800-582-7277 or [info@aaa7.org](mailto:info@aaa7.org)**



# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

## Treat Insomnia, Cure Depression

Not being able to sleep well can make depression worse; therefore, one of the best strategies to improve depression in older adults is to treat sleep problems. Treating insomnia does not always have to involve taking medications. Here are some ways to improve sleeping habits to promote better sleep:

- Try to establish a regular bedtime hour and wake-up time.
- Avoid watching TV, reading, or eating in bed.
- Avoid smoking, drinking alcohol or caffeine in the afternoon.
- Establish some relaxing bedtime rituals such as drinking warm milk.



## Be Wary of Scams - Supplements

Most dietary supplements do not undergo government testing or review before they are put on the market. Be wary of claims that a supplement can ease depression, shrink tumors, or cure Alzheimer's disease. Talk to your doctor before starting any supplement.



## Don't Fall - Be Safe: Medications and Balance

*Older adults are especially vulnerable to drug-related balance problems because drugs are absorbed and broken down differently as people age. The problem may not be a single drug, but a combination of medications being taken together. If you are concerned about balance, ask your doctor to review your medications.*

## Eating and Emotions

Depression can affect people's appetite in different ways. Many people turn to certain foods for comfort when they are depressed. These may be old favorites from childhood—a scoop of mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, a bowl of rice pudding. The danger is in overdoing it. These foods are often high in fat, sugar, and calories that can easily add up. On the other hand, some people lose their appetite when they are depressed. Eating with others can help you and the person in your care stay connected. Remember also that being physically active can help decrease the symptoms of depression.





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## **Safety Tips - *Alcohol and Substance Abuse***

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Due to the many physical changes associated with aging, the effects of alcohol and drugs are a lot worse in older adults. Their bodies are less able to break down these substances, which may result in their accumulation and possible interaction with each other. Aside from injuries and accidents, excessive alcohol consumption increases a person's risk of liver disease, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer, and dementia.

To avoid the negative effects of alcohol and drugs:

- Limit alcohol intake to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. One drink is about 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor.
- Remind the person in your care that if they are taking medications, consuming alcohol can cause dangerous interactions.
- Encourage them to quit smoking.

