

# 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!**



**OCTOBER 2011**

## Mental Illness, Depression and Stress

Mental illness can begin at any age, from childhood through adult years. Because older adults may have a combination of medical, psychological and social issues, diagnosing and managing mental health problems can be challenging.

Mental illness refers to a wide range of disorders that affect mood, thinking and behavior. These can include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors. Many people have mental health *concerns* from time to time; these only become a mental *illness* when the signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect the ability to function in daily life, work or relationships.

Many people with debilitating mental health issues avoid treatment or think that this is a normal part of aging. In most cases, mental illness symptoms can be managed with a combination of medications and counseling (psychotherapy).

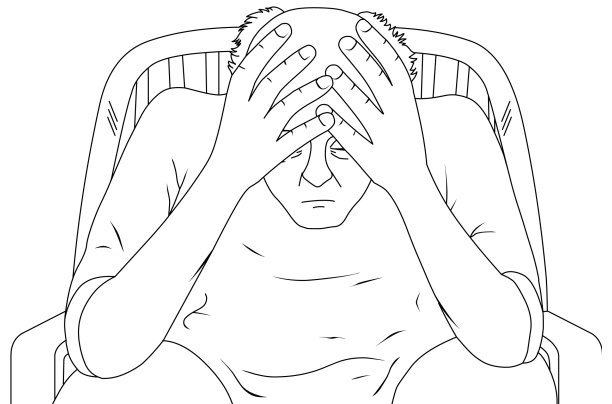
Mental illness is a leading cause of disability. Aside from reducing overall quality of life, untreated mental illness can cause severe emotional, behavioral and physical health, and legal and financial problems.

### **Symptoms**

Symptoms of mental illness may include unusual thinking, behavior or

emotions; sadness and anxiety; withdrawing from friends and family; excessive energy; sleep disturbance; and even delusions or hallucinations.

Others may be the first to realize there's a problem. In these cases, have an open and honest discussion with the person in your care about your concerns. You can also help them find a qualified provider and make an appointment, and perhaps even attend with them. Most mental illnesses don't



improve on their own, and if untreated, may become worse.

## October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Each year, many thousands of older persons are abused, neglected and exploited. Domestic violence among older adults is a form of elder abuse, and it can turn a home into a place of fear, hopelessness and desperation.

**If you are in danger, call 911, your local hotline, or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at:**

**1-800-799-7233 or  
TTY: 1-800-787-3224**

*Source: Domestic Violence Awareness Month.*

*Visit the Domestic Violence Awareness Project at [www.nrcdv.org](http://www.nrcdv.org)*



## Possible Causes of Mental Illness

No one is sure what causes mental illness. Factors that may play a role:

**Inherited Traits.** Mental illness may run in families and a life situation may trigger it in those who are at risk.

**Biological Factors.** Outside forces such as severe brain injury or exposure to viruses or toxins before birth.

**Life Experiences.** Challenging situations like the loss of a loved one and high stress may trigger mental illness. Being brought up with low self-esteem or enduring sexual or physical abuse can lead to unhealthy patterns of thinking.

**Brain Chemistry.** Hormone imbalances may play a role.

### **Coping and Support**

Coping with a mental illness is challenging. Provide support by helping someone you know with the following tips:

Learn about their illness so that you (and the family) understand what they are going through and identify ways you can help.

Keep connected with friends and family to participate in social activities. Ask for help when needed and tell loved ones how they are doing.

Keep a journal to track what triggers or improves their symptoms. Journaling is also a healthy way to explore and express pain, anger, fear and other emotions.

Join a support group, to connect with others facing similar challenges. Support groups are available in many communities and online. Visit NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

*Source: MayoClinic.com; National Alliance on Mental Illness; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.*

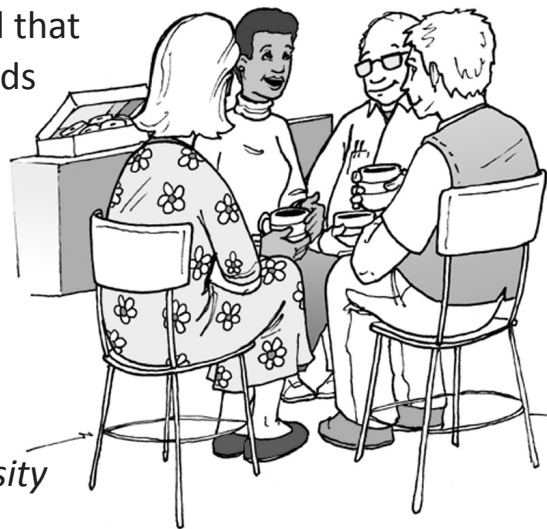
### **Suicide Prevention**

Suicidal thoughts and behavior are common with some mental illnesses. If you think the person in your care may hurt themselves or attempt suicide, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately, or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a trained counselor.

## Good Friends are the Secret to a Long Life

Exercise, diet, and stress reduction help us live better and longer lives.

Researchers also found that people with good friends live longer. In fact, having good friends can extend your life to the same degree as quitting smoking!



*Source: Researchers at Brigham Young University*

**Want to learn more about home and community-based services and how we can help you? Contact us today!**

**1-800-582-7277 • TTY: 711**

**e-mail: [info@aaa7.org](mailto:info@aaa7.org) • website: [www.aaa7.org](http://www.aaa7.org)**



*“Hope for miracles, but don’t rely on one.”*

- Yiddish Proverb -

## *Taking Care of Yourself* - **Keep Training the Brain**

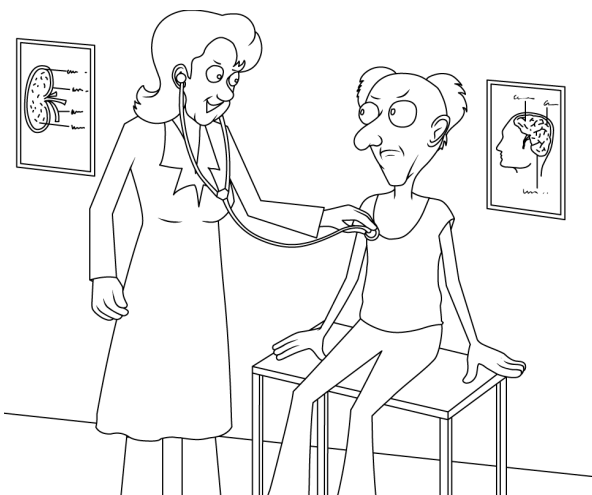
Your brain is like a muscle; if you don't use it, you lose it! The brain declines not from aging, but from lack of use. Watching television requires less brain energy than looking at a wall! So, play cards, write a letter, do crossword puzzles, stay social, take a class, or find an activity you enjoy that stretches your mind.



*Source: Dare To Be 100; Walter M. Bortz, M.D.; 1996*



## **Live Life Laughing**



*"I'd say it's your liver...but if you insist on a second opinion...I'll say gall bladder."*

## **Don't Fall Be Safe**

*When walking is difficult, seniors sometimes find it hard to concentrate on both talking and walking at the same time. Don't ask complicated questions while you are helping the person in your care go up and down stairs, get in or out of the bath, or in low-light situations.*





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

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Your local Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc. serves the following counties in Ohio: Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton.

Services are rendered on a non-discriminatory basis. Those interested in learning more about the services provided through the

Area Agency on Aging District 7 can call toll-free at 1-800-582-7277. Here, individuals can talk directly with a nurse or social worker who will assist them with information surrounding the programs and services that are available to best serve their needs. The Agency can also be reached via e-mail at [info@aaa7.org](mailto:info@aaa7.org).

## Help Control Mental Illness

### *To control stress and reduce symptoms, encourage the person you know to:*

- **Actively participate in treatment**, by working with providers on determining what the best treatment options are, depending on symptoms and severity, personal preferences, insurance coverage, side effects, and other factors.
- **Stick to the treatment plan**, so that symptoms don't return. If they are having medication side effects, talk to the doctor before making changes.
- **Pay attention to warning signs and triggers**. Know what to do if symptoms return.
- **Keep up routine medical care**, by receiving regular checkups.
- **Find help when needed**, as mental health conditions are harder to treat if you wait until symptoms become severe. Maintenance treatment prevents relapse.
- **Maintain good health**, by gaining enough sleep, eating healthy meals, and exercising.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol**, which can worsen symptoms or interact with medications.



Source: [MayoClinic.com](http://MayoClinic.com)