

Mental Wellness

When searching the literature on mental health, it is difficult to find a straightforward definition of mental wellness. Instead, we define its absence.

Although many adults do not fit snugly into descriptions of depression and anxiety, depressive symptoms and behaviors that identify anxiety are seen in many people. Unfortunately, even if these adults recognize their depressive symptoms and feelings of anxiety, and even if low-cost treatment were available around the corner, the stigma of mental illness inhibits many of them from seeking help.

Depressive symptoms affect the quality and enjoyment of life. Depressed people tend to exercise less, smoke more and eat less healthily. Sixty to 90 percent of people who commit suicide suffer from depression.

Mental wellness can be influenced by:

- **Biological factors** - changes in the central nervous system, medications, illnesses and family history
- **Social environment** - losses, traumatic events, stress and low economic status

Mental wellness is promoted through:

- Physical activity
- Good nutrition
- Adequate rest and sleep
- Stress reduction
- An optimistic attitude that can include humor, creativity and faith
- Optimal medication management
- Emotionally enriched environments

For people to savor their later years, maintaining mental wellness is an essential charge, both for themselves and for those who work with them.

What Are Barriers to Mental Wellness?

Many barriers may hamper detecting any type of depression or anxiety in adults and may result in underreporting the seriousness of symptoms. These include:

Age-related Changes

Signs of depression look like changes that are often misconstrued as a normal part of aging such as reduced activity level, reduced appetite, changes in sleep patterns, or stooped posture.

Illness

Physical illness can mask depression and depression can mimic physical ailments, often leading to misdiagnosis. If depression and/or anxiety coexists with a physical illness, it often worsens or complicates the physical problem.

Attitudes of Others

Signs of depression and/or anxiety may be dismissed because of stereotypical beliefs about people - for example, defining them as "difficult" or irritable, forgetful, complaining about their health, or appearing sad.

Denial

Having grown up in a time when "toughing things out" was the approved remedy, older adults may deny their depressed feelings as signs of seeming weak or crazy.

Alcohol or Drugs

Some people in late life turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with losses. Because these substances can slow the central nervous system, their consumption can intensify depression - and can be lethal in some treatments of depression and anxiety. If you suffer from alcohol or drug addiction, you should seek help from alcohol and drug rehab centers in Chicago.

Health Complaints

Some adults tend to somaticize - complain about physical problems, rather than talk about emotional pain. Complaints may center on problems with weakness, constipation, abdominal pains, chest pains or other vague symptoms disguising the underlying depression.

Stigma

As long as the stigma of mental illness remains, the difficulty of identifying the disorders in adults and providing them with proper care will remain a significant barrier to their ability to reach mental wellness.

Note: When drugs and alcohol are involved it's always best to consider the various types of help that are available. Drug and alcohol problems which persist might require the help of a good drug rehab center.