



**Tarrant County Mental Health & Aging Coalition  
in recognizing**

***Older Americans' Mental Health Week***  
**May 24-30, 2009**



Good mental health is attainable at any age. "The successful performance of mental function resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity" is the US Surgeon General's description of good mental health. It is also an ideal description of healthy aging.

Many older people still believe the myth that mental health problems result from personal failure or weakness. This stigma means that they may not want to admit that a problem or symptom exists, and do not seek help.

***It is okay to ask for help. Recognizing symptoms, seeking medical evaluation and treatment, and using community resources can help improve the quality of an older adult's life.***

Some older adults may experience challenges and adjustments which test their ability to cope. Loss of loved ones, illness, and radical lifestyle changes can test coping skills. People of any age from any family may have good mental health or may experience mental illness.

People who have physical problems like heart problems and diabetes are more likely to develop mental health problems. People with depression or anxiety are more likely to develop physical problems and may experience lack of energy or stomach problems or difficulty concentrating.

Many older adults and even health care professionals misdiagnose depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems as physical troubles. Studies have shown that many older adults with depression spend as much as three times the amount of money on health care as other older adults.

The Mental Health Association of Tarrant County's Mental Health and Aging Coalition joins the efforts started by the Older Women's League (OWL) in championing the mental health needs of older adults. With May recognized as Older Americans' Month as established by the US Administration on Aging, the last week of May is when we focus on the mental health of older adults.

Community Resources:

- Mental Health Association of Tarrant County, 817-335-5405 mhatc.org
- Tarrant County Mental Health and Mental Retardation 817-569-4300 mhmrctc.org
- Information and Referral Call 2-1-1
- Area Agency on Aging of United Way of Tarrant County 817-258-8081

*Services for people age 60 and older and family caregivers; Healthy IDEAS program addressing depression in older adults, and Neighbor Helping Neighbor program*

- Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) 1-888-730-2372 tarrantcountyadrc.org
- Gerontology Assessment & Planning Clinic (GAP) 817-735-2200
- University of North Texas Health Science Center; *Medical evaluation and treatment*

## Ten Facts about Mental Health and Aging

1. **Mental health problems are not a normal part of aging.** Deep sadness that lingers may signal clinical depression. An anxiety disorder is different from normal worries. One in about 6% of older adults has a diagnosable depressive illness.
2. **Mental health is as important as physical health.** Untreated mental disorders in older adults can lead to diminished functioning, substance abuse, poor quality of life, and increased mortality. Research shows mental illnesses can slow healing from physical illnesses.
3. **Healthy older adults can continue to thrive, grow and enjoy life!** Reading, walking, and socializing are just a few of the activities that many individuals enjoy at any age. Exercising your mind and body and maintaining social connections are good for your mental health, too!
4. **Mental health problems are a risk for older adults, regardless of history.** While some adults go through life managing a chronic mental illness, mental health problems can also appear late in life. Sometimes mental health deteriorates in response to a stroke, Parkinson's, cancer, arthritis or diabetes, and even some medications. Older adults without a history of substance abuse may abuse medications, alcohol or drugs.
5. **Suicide is a risk among older adults.** Older adults have the highest suicide rate in the country. Those aged 85 and over have the highest suicide rate; those aged 75-84 have second highest. Older adults' suicide attempts are more lethal. For those 65 and older, there is one suicide for every four attempts compared to one for every 20 attempts for all other age groups.
6. **These symptoms call for consultation with a healthcare professional:** Sadness that has lasted longer than two weeks; consistent worries about issues such as money, family and health; consistent trouble sleeping or concentrating; frequent trouble remembering things or feeling confused in familiar places; having more than one alcoholic drink a day or taking more medication than prescribed
7. **Older adults can be helped with the same success as younger people.** 80% of older adults recovered from depression after receiving treatment that included both psychotherapy and anti-depressant medication.
8. **Our healthcare system is not adequately helping older adults with mental disorders.** Researchers estimate that up to 63% of older adults with a mental disorder do not receive the services they need. 75% of those who commit suicide have visited a primary care physician within month of their suicide.
9. **Misdiagnosis and avoidance are common.** Primary care physicians fail to diagnose depression 50% of the time. Only half of older adults who discuss specific mental health problems with a physician receive any treatment.
10. **Older adults have specific mental health care needs.** Changing bodies and chemistry, changes in family and friendships, and changes in living situations can all impact mental health. Sometimes helping solve basic problems like transportation can lower stress, improve community connections, and improve outlook and mood.

(Download this sheet online: <http://www.mhatc.org/downloads/mhweek2009re.pdf> ) This Information sheet includes material adapted from:

- OWL – The Voice for Women of Midlife and Older <http://www.mentalhealthweek.org/Welcome.html>
- Philadelphia Mental Health and Aging Resource Guide, 2006 <http://www.mhaging.org/guide/>
- National Association for Social Workers <http://www.naswdc.org/practice/aging/050407.asp>