

## Depression and Dementia

### **Dementia:**

Dementia is a decline in cognitive skills that interferes with daily living. Memory, reasoning and language may be affected. Changes in mood and personality may occur. Dementia is treatable, but there is no cure.

### **Depression:**

Depression is a common but serious mood disorder. Symptoms affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities. Depression is treatable and curable.

### **Dementia and depression share common symptoms:**

- Sadness
- Loss of interest in activities enjoyed in the past
- Loss of self-worth
- Loss of hope
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Poor focus
- Difficulty making decisions
- Increased or decreased sleep
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Low energy

### **Depression can cause cognitive problems. Dementia can lead to depression.**

Depression is present in many people diagnosed with dementia. 44% of people with dementia have depression. The part of the brain that regulates memory also regulates emotion. Screening for depression is recommended during assessment for dementia. New dementia diagnosis presents an increased risk of depression and suicide. Newly diagnosed individuals may talk about suicide. Prompt treatment recommended when suicidal ideation expressed. **Speak with your doctor about any concerns.**

### **Signs that person with dementia also has depression:**

- Personal or family history of mood disorders
- Feelings of guilt, loss of hope, loss of self-worth, suicidal ideation
- Problems with daily living skills are worse than cognitive symptoms
- Irritability or agitation
- Social withdrawal

### **Signs that person with depression also has dementia:**

- Unusual changes in behavior

- Little or no response to treatment for depression
- Cognitive symptoms remain as mood improves
- Family history of dementia
- Multiple medical problems
- Problems with daily living skills are worse than symptoms of depression

### **Helpful ideas for caregivers**

- Tap into activities that preserve abilities and interests
- Provide time to be competent in meaningful tasks
- Provide time to be helpful
- Reminisce about joyful events
- Listen to favorite music
- Engage in regular physical activity
- Encourage social outings
- Use simple yes/no questions and one-step directions
- Use a calm and reassuring tone
- Avoid correcting
- Stick to a routine
- Simplify surroundings
- Simplify tasks for success
- Seek caregiver education and support

### **Sources of Information:**

- Presentation on *Mental Illness and Dementia* by Dr. Art Walaszek, Professor of Psychiatry at University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, presented at Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute, September 27, 2017
- Data from The National Institute of Mental Health (part of the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

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