



Mental Health Among Older Adults with Disabilities

Overview

As people age, the likelihood of having any type of disability increases, and people that already have one or more disabilities may encounter more concerns. This population has an increased risk of mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety. However, there are ways to prevent and support aging people with disabilities and mental health concerns.

By the Numbers

It is estimated that 58% of the United States population has any disability¹ and that nearly 10% of the adult population has a cognitive impairment¹. Across the entire population in the U.S., approximately 15% had one or more mental health (MH) symptoms, and among those reporting MH symptoms, over 70% also needed help with daily living activities.

Risks for Adverse Mental Health

Some things that increase the risk of adverse mental health symptoms include social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation and loneliness are related ideas. Social isolation refers to someone having very few social contacts or connections. Loneliness refers to subjective feelings when lacking enough social connections (feeling sad and lonely). There is overlap between loneliness and social isolation, but a person can also be happy with few contacts (socially isolated) or they can feel loneliness even if they have social contacts (not isolated, but feeling lonely)².

Being socially isolated and feeling loneliness lead to negative physical health outcomes such as increased illness and mortality (at the population level)³. Loneliness is linked to

development of, or increases in, depression and other mental health concerns and lower reported happiness and well-being³.

Tips and Resources

Clinical studies show that interventions that provide social activities, daily life skills training, and other psychosocial supports were effective in increasing quality of life and reducing depression risk in an aging population⁴.

When it is not possible for someone to leave their home, gather in groups, or have visitors, there are other ways to connect. Phone calls, sending a card or letter, video calls, and engaging in enjoyable hobbies or types of physical activity can also support better quality of life.

Conclusion

We will all be impacted by MH concerns at some point in our lives. Whether it is our own experience or the experience of others, learning about the signs and symptoms is important to help everyone with their MH. We can all learn help each other recognize and address our difficult experiences as we age.

Contributors

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References

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3. [Ortiz-Ospina, E., & Roser, M. \(2020\). Loneliness and Social Connections. *Our World in Data*.](#)
4. [Forsman, A. K., Nordmyr, J., & Wahlbeck, K. \(2011\). Psychosocial interventions for the promotion of mental health and the prevention of depression among older adults. *Health promotion international*, 26\(suppl 1\), i85-i107.](#)

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