

## Healthy IDEAS and National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month, October 2021

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Many of us feel we are experiencing difficult times. Few people would turn on today's news to perk up and feel better. And, of course, the people we serve are often under additional ongoing pressure due to illness, financial hardships, or family crises. All of this and other factors can trigger episodes of depression—when inspiration and motivation evaporate, and people struggle to complete even routine tasks. Depression interferes with a person's daily life and normal functioning.

October is National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month. We want to raise awareness about depression by emphasizing that it is a common but serious illness that is also highly treatable.

Here are some symptoms of depression:

- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Feeling sad, anxious, or empty
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Losing interest in once-enjoyable activities
- Thoughts or talk of suicide
- Difficulty concentrating on activities, such as reading or watching TV
- Moving or talking slower than normally

- Or, by contrast, acting fidgety or restless

Not everyone with depression will exhibit all these symptoms, but those grieving a recent loss or people who have gone through a recent emotional crisis may experience symptoms more often. Experts say depression isn't caused by a single factor, but most likely results from a combination of genetic, biochemical, environmental, and psychological influences. Depression often accompanies other illnesses, such as anxiety disorders or alcohol/substance abuse. And it can affect anyone at any time—from children to older adults.

Older adults experiencing depression are often contending with chronic illness and other losses that happen later in life. The Healthy Living Center of Excellence is offering a free program, Healthy IDEAS, to aid older adults confronting this issue. Healthy IDEAS—which stands for Identifying Depression, Empowering Activities for Seniors—is an Evidence-Based program that integrates depression awareness and management into existing care management services consumers are already receiving.

The program improves participants' quality of life by:

- **Screening** for symptoms of depression and assessing their severity
- **Educating** older adults and caregivers about depression
- **Linking** older adults to primary care and mental health providers
- **Empowering** older adults to manage their depression symptoms through changing their thinking and behavior—and encouraging their involvement in meaningful activities
- **Assessing** clients' progress

Mary, an 88-year-old married woman, is a Healthy IDEAS success story. Feeling “less than herself,” she decided to begin the Healthy IDEAS program. When she took an initial depression assessment, she scored 13 on the validated Personal Health Questionnaire Depression Scale, indicating she was experiencing moderate depression. Mary completed the program and worked with her care

manager toward her goal of tutoring children after school. Mary received a post-intervention score of 1 on the scale, indicating she had no depression.

Mary says she has never felt better, and the program bolstered her health, strength, and sense of confidence. Her family has noticed her enhanced energy and mood. She participates in many more physical and social activities and has also improved her communication with her healthcare provider (PCP).

The first step toward obtaining treatment for depression is to visit a physician and get an appropriate diagnosis. Physicians customarily prescribe a combination of psychotherapy and/or medication.

For more information about the Healthy IDEAS program, call 978-946-1211 or email [hlce@esmv.org](mailto:hlce@esmv.org)

**Healthy**  
**IDEAS**