

Prevention of Suicide in Older Adults

LEARN MORE + FIND SUPPORT

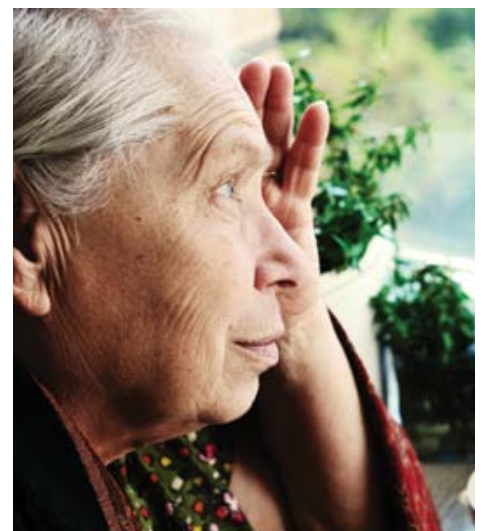


Find hope again.

Aging has its ups and downs. For some people, the senior years are the best of their lives.

For others, the changes in getting older might be stressful. Maybe you have health problems, or are losing loved ones or your independence. These kinds of experiences can be difficult and painful. They may lead to feelings of hopelessness. **In some cases, having many stresses at once can lead to thoughts of suicide.**

Are you feeling sad or hopeless? Losing your concentration? Pulling away from people in your life? Do not be ashamed. With the right help, you can find hope again.



Where can you get help?

It is very important to find help if you are thinking about suicide. You are not alone. Reach out, so your feelings can be turned around. Family members and friends can remind you of what is good in your life. They can help you find the right support.

Emergency room / 9-1-1

In an emergency, go to the hospital or call 9-1-1. They can direct you to the help you need.

Crisis Line / Distress Centre

Call a local crisis line if you are feeling sad, hopeless or alone. People who care are there to listen. They also have information about helpful resources in your community. These steps can help you find your path back to health. You can find a list of crisis lines in the front pages of your phone book, or on the internet.

Family doctor, walk-in, or urgent care clinic

Go to your family doctor, walk-in clinic, or urgent care clinic if you are feeling depressed or thinking about suicide. Ask a friend or family member to go with you. They can help you tell the health care provider what is wrong.

Pharmacist

Speak to your Pharmacist. He/she is a health care professional who can work with you and your doctor to guide you through this difficult time. Pharmacists can help ensure your medication is working well and help you understand its effects. They can also offer information about mental health, including helpful organizations and resources.

Living and aging well

Here are ways to boost well-being and take care of your mental health. These ideas may help you to build hope and a sense of meaning or purpose in life.

- Reach out to your family and friends. Spend time with people who know you.
- Be active and take care of yourself – exercise, eat and sleep well, and cut back on smoking and drinking alcohol.
- Get connected – join religious, spiritual or social groups in your community.



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- Consider volunteering your time if that is possible.
- Find a new hobby or develop interests that you enjoy.
- Get help if you are depressed or thinking about suicide.

Some of these things might be easier to do than others. Discuss them with your family, friends and caregivers. Those supporters can help you find new and creative ways to be well and stay well. You might inspire them to protect and improve their health too.

Worried about someone you love?

Provide support

Reach out if someone you know is struggling. Support your loved one in finding the help they need. What can you do? Talk to them. Listen and express concern. Let them know you care. Reassure them that they are not alone. Ask direct but gentle questions. Get advice from health experts.

Watch for WARNING SIGNS of suicide in older adults. Learn to identify someone at risk of suicide. Take these warning signs seriously.

Someone at risk of suicide might:

- Be sad or depressed*, and have trouble sleeping and eating.
- Be isolated and withdrawn, or avoid their friends, family, or social supports.
- Feel hopeless, helpless, anxious or worthless.
- Lose interest in things they care about.
- Have lost independence, or feel like a burden to others.
- See no reason for living, or lose their sense of purpose in life.
- Switch suddenly from deep sadness to calmness or happiness.
- Feel trapped or like there is no way out of a situation.
- Be overwhelmed and unable to cope.
- Have experienced trauma, or even have tried suicide before.

*See related brochure *Depression in Older Adults* for a list of symptoms.



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Actions a suicidal person might take include:

- Talking about death or about wanting to die by suicide / saying things like “it would be better if I weren’t here” or “soon I will see (someone who has died) again.”
- Showing an interest in danger or behaving dangerously.
- Taking risks out of character, like drinking too much alcohol or spending money.

Warning signs might be coupled with otherwise normal acts such as:

- Preparing for a long yet unplanned trip (paying bills, cancelling the newspaper or telephone service, etc.).
- Suddenly putting affairs in order without reason (examples: writing or changing a will; giving away prized possessions; giving away or putting down pets; throwing out photographs, letters or important documents; writing a “goodbye letter”; buying life insurance; making funeral arrangements).

If someone you know shows warning signs, seek emergency or medical help NOW.

While waiting for help to arrive:

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Listen to them in a supportive and non-judgmental way.
- Remind them of reasons for living and things that make them hopeful.

Then, build hope. Stay connected with your loved one. Your ongoing support will help.



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Important health phone numbers

Use this area to record numbers of organizations and services that can help you.

Emergency: 9-1-1

Doctor

Counsellor / Therapist

Pharmacist

Distress / Crisis Line

Local branch of Canadian Mental Health Association

Spiritual Leader or other community supports

This brochure is adapted from the CCSMH *National Guidelines for Seniors' Mental Health: The Assessment and Treatment of Depression*.

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Disclaimer: This brochure is intended for information purposes only. It is not intended to be interpreted or used as a standard of medical practice.

Organization contacts

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH)
www.ccsmh.ca

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP)
www.suicideprevention.ca

Canadian Caregiver Coalition (CCC)
www.ccc-ccan.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
www.cmha.ca

