

## DEPRESSION

# 4 Tips for Managing Depression in a Loved One with Dementia



As any veteran caregiver can attest to, dementia has a nasty way of making a difficult situation even more challenging.

So, when you combine dementia and depression together in a single elderly loved one, it can be especially hard for a concerned family member to know how to make things better.

Anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, anti-anxiety medications—which of these (if any) is right for an aging adult with depression and dementia? Is there a way that I can help my loved one without putting them on high doses of medication?

Depending on what kind of dementia your loved one has, and how severe their depression is, the answers to these questions will vary; which is why Robin Dessel, Director of Memory Care at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, says the first step is to seek a formal diagnosis of depression from a qualified medical professional.

After an official diagnosis has been made and a treatment plan—involving talk therapy, medications or a combination of both—has been drawn up,

Dessel suggests caregivers turn to holistic therapies (i.e. meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, etc.) to, "foster health and harmony," in a loved one who is dealing with both dementia and depression.

According to Dessel, holistic therapies are a growing trend in the field of dementia care. "I have observed the power of holistic healing—not in reversing or resolving a medical diagnosis—but in re-igniting the human spirit," she says.

Dessel offers a few tips for helping a loved one with dementia manage their depression holistically:

- **Approach the healing process the right way:** Depending on your loved one's individual situation, medications to manage their symptoms may or may not be necessary. Either way, Dessel suggests putting your efforts towards, "re-igniting the human spirit" in your family member. She says that she has seen first-hand how interventions such as visualization, yoga and deep breathing can help people with dementia combat depression. Discover additional benefits of yoga for seniors.
- **Infuse life with fulfilling activities:** Ask yourself one question: What used to bring happiness and fulfillment to my loved one's life? Attempt to incorporate some form of their previous passions into their regular routine. If attending salsa dancing lessons is out of the question for your mom, you could split the difference by playing a bit of salsa music and encouraging her to get up and dance in the living room.
- **Get out of the house:** Dessel recommends "fresh air therapy" as a wonderful way to help a depressed loved one re-connect with the invigorating energy of the living world. While you're out and about, try encouraging your family member to engage

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socially as well. If you need some inspiration, here's a list of 10 summer activities to do with seniors.

- **Embrace imperfection:** Your elderly loved one is likely going to want to do things for themselves as much as possible. As long as there is no danger of them hurting themselves or someone else, Dessel recommends allowing an elder to do as much as they can on their own—even if that means that the laundry isn't perfectly folded, or the dishes are put away haphazardly.

By Anne-Marie Botek

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