



Mood & Brain Health

Myth: Feeling ‘blue’ is expected as you get older.

What does the research say? Depression is not a normal part of aging.¹ Studies show that most older adults feel satisfied with their lives even though they might have more physical problems.



There are several factors that may lead to mental health challenges, including family history, changes to your brain, or the way difficult events impact you. The nature of depression is such that depressed individuals are not interested in being social or active. But inactivity and isolation make the situation worse. We now have proof that healthy aging involves exercise, staying social and learning new things; and that becoming active in these areas can have an antidepressant effect.

What does this mean for me?

Depression is more than just having a bad day or feeling down. If you feel sad, hopeless or bored with things you normally enjoy for weeks on end, you may be experiencing depression.² Your mental health matters. Early detection and treatment are important since most mental health problems are treatable. It is worth talking to your doctor or nurse practitioner about your mental health in the same way you would try to look after your physical health. There are many simple things you can do to help yourself too.



How do I apply this in my daily life?

- **Be active.** Physical activity builds strength, improves fitness and elevates your mood. Keep it simple: walk around the block, try light work around the house, take the stairs, park a little farther away from the mall entrance. There are many safe exercises that can be done regardless of physical ability, such as lifting light free weights (such as soup cans) in repetitive lifts, 'chair-yoga', mindful breathing exercises, or even slowly lifting your legs. Ask your physician about options that would best suit you. The more you move, the better you will feel.
- **Be social.** Depression distorts thinking in a negative way, so it is important to surround yourself with support. Talking with other people can help to change your perspective – even for a little while. Invite people (loved ones, a neighbour, a friend) over for a visit or keep in touch by phone. It takes a bit of effort, but socializing with others can help keep negative thoughts away and provide relief.
- **Be curious.** It's never too late to learn a new skill. Finding a new hobby, volunteering, or learning anything new can change your focus, act like an anti-depressant, and help boost your mood.

Recommended Resources & Activities:

- Try the [Fountain of Health's Wellness App](#) to practice setting small, doable health goals in areas that matter to you.
- [Mental Health America](#)
- [Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health](#)
- [Mood Disorders Society of Canada](#)

Adapted from Baycrest Health Sciences Education and Training resources, and Fountain of Health 2019.