



## Start the New Year by Reaching Out for Emotional Help

The holidays can be a difficult time for many older adults, not only physically, but emotionally as well. If you feel a bit down and thinking back, you realize that you've felt that way throughout the holiday season, it's important to start the new year with a new outlook. Following a recent hearing about older adults and depression, Senator Larry Craig, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging made an appeal to those who are feeling down, especially older men, to seek help for depression.

"If you have depression, if you're feeling blue, or you just don't feel right, be open and up-front with your doctor," says Mary Brintnall-Peterson, University of Wisconsin-Extension program specialist in aging. "Tell your physician how you have been feeling. There are many things you can do including exercising, seeking out new hobbies, talking with friends and, in some cases the use of medication can be helpful. The doctor needs to know what you need, so be honest."

Older adults have the highest suicide rate of all age groups in the United States -- four times the national average. According to some sources, 75 percent of elderly suicide victims met with their doctors within one month of their suicide -- and were not treated or referred to treatment for depression.

"Talking about feelings can be tough," Brintnall-Peterson says. "But the reality is that depression is oftentimes a physical condition that can be treated with medication -- just like heart disease. If you are feeling down, regardless of the time of year, you should seek help."

Time of year can have an impact on your mood, says Brintnall-Peterson. Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD, often called the 'winter blues,' is a reaction to lack of sunlight in winter. Studies have shown that when people are deprived of sunlight, such as in the winter months, the brain can release increased levels of a hormone called melatonin, which can cause symptoms of depression. When exposed to artificial bright light, the brain reduces that hormone level and many people report feeling better as a result. One study found that an hour's walk in winter sunlight was as effective as two and a half hours under bright artificial light.

Researchers have also found that depression affects twice as many women as men. However, new findings reveal that women and men may just talk differently -- or in the case of men, not talk -- about the issues they face. And with men, not talking is a factor since men are four times more likely to commit suicide than women.

To help stop that trend, the National Institute of Mental Health has launched a public awareness campaign about depression in men called "Real Men. Real Depression." For more information, whether you are a man or a woman, call 1-866-227-6464 toll-free, or e-mail to [menanddepression@mail.nih.gov](mailto:menanddepression@mail.nih.gov).

Studies indicate that 85 percent of people who died of suicide told someone what they were going to do, beginning two months before the act. "If someone says something to you about wanting to take their life, take them seriously," Brintnall-Peterson says. "That is the only way we can truly help reverse this tragic trend -- and perhaps make this time of year a little happier for everyone!"

Provided by Mary Brintnall-Peterson, Ph.D., Program Specialist in Aging at the University of Wisconsin-Extension. For more information or questions, contact Mary by phone (608) 262-8083 or by email at [Mary.brintnall-Peterson@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:Mary.brintnall-Peterson@ces.uwex.edu).

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