

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression can increase your risk of falling:

It is important to take care of your mental and cognitive health as you get older. Certain mental health conditions are common in older people e.g. 10-15% of people aged 65 and over have depression and about 10% experience anxiety. Depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and cognitive decline are all risk factors for falls.



Did you know?

Medicines used to manage depression, anxiety and poor sleep can increase your risk of falls, but you shouldn't stop or change your medication without consulting your doctor first.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal feeling people experience in response to threats in the environment and we all feel anxiety at some point in time. However, if a person is in a constant state of worry that affects their day to day life, they may have an anxiety disorder. Feeling anxious can increase your risk of falling. Anxiety can be expressed in different ways, examples are given below:

Behavioural	Feelings	Thoughts	Physical symptoms
Difficulty making decisions	Overwhelmed	Finding it hard to stop worrying	Racing heart
Being startled easily	Fear	"People are judging me"	Vomiting and nausea
Avoiding objects or situations	Worry	"I'm going crazy"	Sleep disturbances
Avoiding eye contact	Dread	"I'm going to die"	Muscle tension

Depression

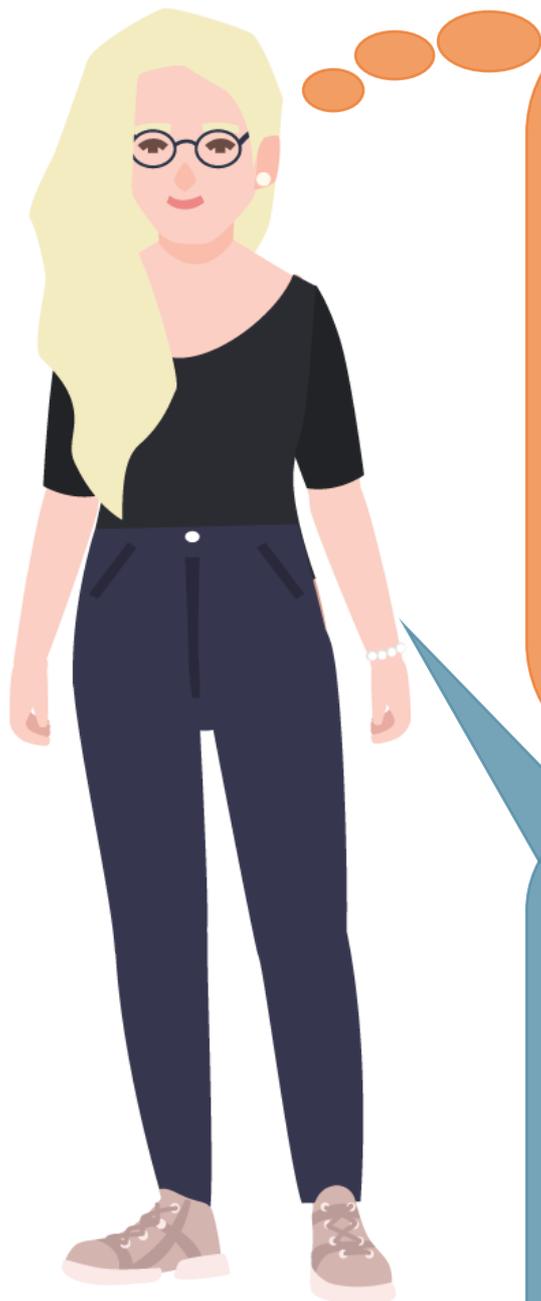
Depression is a mood disorder characterised by sadness or loss of interest in activities that used to bring happiness to a person. Depression may also manifest as persistent fatigue, feelings of guilt and low self-worth or disturbances in sleep, concentration or appetite. If you have felt sad, down or miserable for more than 2 weeks, you may have depression. This can increase your risk of falling. Examples of depressive symptoms are given below:

Behavioural	Feelings	Thoughts	Physical symptoms
Inability to find pleasure in any activity	Sadness	Indecisive	Sleeping more or less
Difficulty getting motivated in the morning	Emptiness	Loss of self-esteem	Fatigue
Withdrawing from family/friends	Moody	Persistent suicidal thoughts	Slowed movement
	Worthless	"I'm a failure"; "It's my fault"	Memory problems

Mental health, physical activity and other treatments

- Increasing your physical activity levels can help manage anxiety, depression, stress and sleep problems
- Other treatments can also help conditions like depression and anxiety e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, or Interpersonal therapy – they focus primarily on education, problem solving, goal setting and behaviour change. These treatments are available through a psychologist and are also offered online. You can find some links to good online programs on the next page.
- Sometimes medication might be needed too, your doctor will help determine this – it often depends on how severe the condition is and whether you respond to other therapy

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Key points to remember:

- Anxiety and depression are relatively common in older people
- Anxiety and depression are risk factors for falls
- Certain medicines used to manage anxiety, depression and poor sleep can also increase your risk of falling – if you are taking medicines to manage these conditions, don't stop or change your medications without discussing with your doctor first
- If you are experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression, talk to your doctor
- Physical activity and exercise can help manage anxiety, depression, stress and sleep problems
- There are other treatments for anxiety and depression too, consult your doctor or health care provider and come up with a plan that is right for you

What can I do right now?

- Talk to your doctor if you have symptoms of low mood, depression or anxiety
- Talk to someone you know and trust about the way you are feeling
- Consider being more physically active – if you haven't exercised for a while, start slow, with short sessions and gradually build up, if you have chronic health conditions talk to your doctor or physiotherapist before starting
- Consider other treatments for anxiety and depression, talk to your health care provider and come up with a plan that is right for you

For more information visit on anxiety and depression visit:

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

<https://www.mycompass.org.au/>

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/depression-and-older-people>

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/anxiety>

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs and how to prevent falls, you should seek advice from your health professional. This information was current at the time of development and is generalisable for people >60 years. The associations between mental health conditions and falls may not be causal, but we have presented the best evidence at this point in time.