

Promoting Positive Well-being in Older Adults and Caregivers

In honor of Senior Independence Month, learn how mental health plays an important role in optimal aging.

Taking care of our well-being is important at every age, including our senior years. While later stages of life may include joyful experiences such as becoming a grandparent and entering retirement, older adults may also face common stressors such as isolation, mourning the deaths of friends, an increase in chronic health issues, and financial challenges. As a result, older adults may experience other mental health issues, according to the [American Psychological Association](#) (APA).

Recent data shows that [there are more than 56 million adults ages 65 and older](#) in the United States, making up nearly 17 percent of the U.S. population. A growing aging population means there is also an aging workforce—one in every five U.S. employees is over 65, according to the [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health](#) (NIOSH).

Unfortunately, mental health issues in older adults are often under-identified, and the stigma associated with mental health care may prevent seniors from seeking help, according to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO).

This month, learn how to support colleagues and loved ones to achieve optimal aging.

How does physical aging affect emotional health?

Many physical health obstacles that older adults face go hand-in-hand with their emotional health, according to the [APA](#). Examples include:

Reduced mobility, making it harder to get around and be active in the community

Chronic pain, which can lead to agitation and frustration

Loss of hearing or eyesight, which can result in isolation and feeling cut-off from others

In turn, these stressors can make it difficult to interact with others or participate in certain activities that were once enjoyable. Social and emotional challenges may also arise for older adults, such as:



Loss of friends and family members



Existential crises about death and mortality



Changes in finances during retirement

Repeatedly experiencing these challenges may also lead to depression. In order to address mental health issues in oneself or in others, it can be helpful to understand the signs of depression and other conditions. Common warning signs include:

- Major changes in typical mood
- Restlessness and trouble concentrating
- Feeling angry, irritable, sad, hopeless, or emotionally “flat”
- More worries or stress than usual
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Excessive substance use

Supporting the mental health of older adults

It may be hard to know how to care for another adult, whether it's a friend, partner, or parent, because adults are used to making their own choices about their well-being. Still, it is possible to show up for others in important ways. Here are three ways to support an aging loved one:



Empower their decision-making

For example, if the older adult in your life is willing to see their provider to discuss their physical or emotional health, [help give them confidence](#) by encouraging them to write down their symptoms and questions they have before the visit.



Build their community

Loneliness is a recurring issue for aging populations. When [offering support to an older adult](#), encourage their friends and family to participate in their self-care activities like exercise, gratitude practices, or their personal hobbies. Doing so will provide an opportunity to bond and reduce their sense of isolation.



Respect individual choices

Nobody wants to forfeit control of their day-to-day activities, especially someone who's already concerned about losing independence. The [APA](#) recommends centering your loved one's preferences when suggesting lifestyle, housing, or medical changes, rather than imposing your own idea of what's best for them.

Aging and well-being in Black communities

While mental health is a concern for all older adults, Black individuals may experience additional barriers to seeking care.

According to a resource from the APA, [there are currently more than 4 million Black Americans over the age of 65](#). Black older adults may have experienced cumulative race-related stress, which may have negatively affected their health. Health disparities among Black older adults are rooted in limited access to education, employment, health care, and housing over the course of their lives.

The Black community additionally experiences a heightened stigma around mental health and limited access to professionals who understand their culture, resulting in [a reduced rate of accessing mental health care services](#).

Tips for accessing low-cost care

Some people within the Black community may presume that high-quality care is financially out-of-reach. But there are options.

- ✓ Check with your employer or insurance provider for free or low-cost mental health services. For example, Lyra is a special mental health benefit some companies provide to their employees, which makes access to mental health care easier, more affordable, and even free in many cases.
- ✓ For those without access to Lyra, consider seeing providers who have a sliding scale or discounted rates, based on income or situation. Check out [Mental Health America](#) (MHA) for an affiliate near you who is advocating for care in your community.
- ✓ Look for online offerings, using programs such as the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI), which provides free mental health resources year-round.

Caring for the caregivers

Providing support for a partner, parent, or other older adult is an important role. However, sometimes caregivers can forget to take care of themselves, resulting in caregiver stress.

Caregiver stress is the emotional and physical difficulties that can result from:

- Changes to your relationship with your loved one when you become a caregiver
- Demands on your emotional and physical energy, time, and finances

Thankfully, there are ways to decrease this strain.



Manage tasks by breaking them down.

Split large caregiving responsibilities into small steps.

Schedule the steps for specific times and dates in your calendar.

Identify duties that can be delegated to others (e.g., picking up groceries).



Practice self-care.

Engage in fun activities that fit in different amounts of time (e.g., 10 minutes: stretch your body; 30+ minutes: read a chapter of your favorite novel).

Reserve time in your schedule for these activities, and avoid double-booking yourself.

Remind yourself that the activity is for your well-being, and ultimately that of your loved one, by making a note in your calendar (e.g., “for me and mom”).



Cope with difficult emotions.

Acknowledge the specific circumstance that prompted hard feelings.

Reassure yourself that how you are feeling makes sense given what is happening.

Observe your feelings and allow yourself to be present with your emotions just as they are, without labeling them as good or bad.

It is also important for a caregiver to consider individual support when it's hard to function well at home, work, or in relationships. But it is never too early to reach out—seeking support can help prevent severe caregiver stress from happening in the first place.



Get access to the right kind of support

Every person can benefit from the right mental health care, regardless of what life stage they are in.

Lyra provides care for your emotional and mental health, how, when, and where you need it. Whether you're feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed, support from Lyra can get you back on your feet. With online resources, research-backed therapeutic methods, and top therapists, coaches, and digital tools, you and your eligible dependents can tap into easy, convenient care. [Learn more about Lyra today.](#)