

newsletter

FOURTH EDITION | MARCH 2010

DEPRESSION IN LATER LIFE

Depression is a prolonged state of sadness and low mood that may be accompanied by loss of self-esteem and interest in activities that would normally be enjoyable. It affects the way you eat and sleep, how you feel about yourself, and how you think.

Although depression in the elderly is a common problem, only a small percentage of sufferers get the help they need.

Untreated depression poses serious risks for the elderly; these include illness, alcohol and prescription drug abuse, a higher mortality rate and even suicide. It is therefore important to look out for the warning signs and seek professional help when you feel depressed. The good news is that no one – whether you're 18 or 80 – has to live with depression. With treatment and support, most elderly people who suffer from depression can feel better.

What causes depression?

Certain life challenges faced by the elderly may lead to depression, for example:

- ▶ a reduced sense of 'purpose in life' due to retirement or physical limitations
- ▶ fear of death or anxiety over financial or health issues
- ▶ the recent death of a spouse, family member, friend or pet
- ▶ loneliness and isolation due to living alone or death of a loved one(s)
- ▶ loss of independence by no longer being able to drive.

Symptoms of depression

- ▶ Sadness
- ▶ Loss of appetite progressing to loss of weight
- ▶ Social withdrawal
- ▶ Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- ▶ Feelings of worthlessness and loss of interest in personal care
- ▶ Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Loss of interest in hobbies or other activities that were once enjoyed
- ▶ Suicidal thoughts or attempts

What can I do to help myself?

A person suffering from depression usually does not wish to see anyone or

do anything. Isolation, however, worsens the depression as it causes you to focus on your negative feelings. You can improve your mood by trying the following:

- ▶ Maintain a healthy diet – avoid junk foods and choose a well-balanced diet that will prevent you from feeling tired and run down.
- ▶ Volunteer your time – helping others helps one to regain perspective and makes you feel better about yourself.
- ▶ Learn a new skill – choose something (a hobby) you've always been interested in, e.g. bowling. It is important to schedule time in one's day for rest and recreation.
- ▶ Exercise – choose safe exercises that can build your strength and boost your mood.
- ▶ Limit the time you spend alone – go out to the park or meet with friends. If you cannot, phone them or invite them over.
- ▶ Treat yourself to a holiday or short break – if this is possible, it usually brings some relief by interrupting the daily routine.
- ▶ Seek professional help – see a doctor if you feel depressed as he/she may prescribe medication for you.



QUALSA
excellence you can trust

medical
aid
society
there when you need us.



SOCIETY BENEFITS

SERVICE	BENEFIT	ANNUAL LIMIT	CONDITIONS/REMARKS
Psychological and psychiatric treatment	*PMB: 100% of **NHRPL Non-PMB: 80% of NHRPL out of hospital	R4 100 per family per annum	Once the limit is exhausted, only consultations and services in respect of PMB will be paid in full.

*Prescribed Minimum Benefits

**National Health Reference Price List

GLAUCOMA

Glaucoma is an eye condition in which the optic nerve is damaged by abnormally high pressure levels inside the eye (intraocular pressure). This may be due to the build-up of excess liquid in the eye or the inability to absorb the excess eye fluid. The condition is progressive and, if left untreated, it may lead to loss of vision and blindness.

Risk factors

- ▶ Age over 45
- ▶ Family history of glaucoma
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ History of elevated intraocular pressure
- ▶ Near- and farsightedness

Diagnosis

An ophthalmologist (eye specialist) is able to detect individuals who are at risk (by noting an increase in intraocular pressure) and those who may already have glaucoma (by observing the nerve damage or visual loss). The ophthalmologist will perform a few investigations to confirm the diagnosis, e.g. a tonometry test which measures the pressure inside the eye.

SOCIETY BENEFITS

SERVICE	BENEFIT	ANNUAL LIMIT	CONDITIONS/REMARKS
Optical services inclusive of tonometry and visual screening	100% of cost if obtained from *PPN	One per beneficiary per two-year cycle limited to R400 for consultations outside the network	Subject to two-year cycle and at the PPN Current cycle covers 2009 and 2010 benefit year

*Preferred Provider Network

Share your feelings and fears about glaucoma with your doctor and people you trust.



TYPES OF GLAUCOMA	DESCRIPTION	SYMPTOMS
Angle closure (acute)	Leads to instant blindness but is very rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sudden, severe, deep pain in one eye affecting the entire side of the head ▶ Nausea and vomiting ▶ Glare and light sensitivity ▶ Sudden decrease of vision
Open angle (chronic)	Progresses slowly and is more common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Very subtle, patchy loss of peripheral (sideline) vision ▶ Central part of vision is not affected until a very late stage of the condition

Treatment of glaucoma

Depending on the type of glaucoma, your doctor may choose medication in the form of eye drops to reduce the pressure by decreasing the production of the fluid and increasing its outflow. A specialist might choose surgery or laser therapy.

Your Care Plan is a list of services that will provide you with a guide to scheduling your visits with your doctor and specialist. Please follow it as closely as possible to ensure holistic and optimal management of your conditions.

What can I do to manage this condition?

- ▶ Schedule your medication times around your daily routine, e.g. meal

times (always wash your hands before instilling eye drops).

- ▶ Share your feelings and fears about glaucoma with your doctor and people you trust.
- ▶ Limit night driving if night vision is a problem.
- ▶ Yellow, amber and brown sunglasses or tinted lenses are useful for photo-sensitive problems.
- ▶ Always remember storage conditions for medication and refer to package inserts for details.
- ▶ Do not ignore a painful, red eye after surgery, especially with a discharge, as this could indicate an infection and will need treatment urgently.