

Elderly Suicide

Suicide is a critical problem among elderly populations. Suicide rates are particularly high among older men, with men ages 85 and older having the highest rate of any group in the country. Suicide attempts by older adults are much more likely to result in death than among younger people because they plan more carefully, are less likely to be discovered and rescued, and the increased frailty of elderly populations makes it difficult for them to recover from a suicide attempt.

Warning Signs

Older adults who attempt suicide are often more isolated, more likely to have a plan, and more determined than younger adults. Thoughts in older adults may be linked to several important warning signs that may include:

- Depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and other mental health issues
- Substance abuse, including prescription drugs
- Physical illness, pain, or complaints
- Social isolation

Risk Factors

Due to changes in life stage and role transition, several risk factors may be enhanced for older adults. They may experience a decline in their physical health, loss of independence, and deaths of loved ones. They may also face fear of becoming a burden and concerns about long-term care. Some risk factors include:

- History of abuse or neglect
- Previous suicide attempts
- Chronic pain
- Access to lethal means

How to Help

Seeking help is very important to prevent elderly suicide. Depression and suicidal feelings are treatable mental health disorders. Talk openly and honestly with the individual about any concerns and be supportive in helping them cope with their feelings. They need to have their feelings recognized and diagnosed, and appropriately treated with a thorough treatment plan. Common treatment plans include psychotherapy, medication, or a combination of both.

If you or a loved one is having thoughts about suicide, please call our 24-Hour Helpline at 1.800.928.8000. We can help.

Sources – The Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007>, Suicide Prevention Resource Center: <https://www.sprc.org/populations/older-adults> and National Council on Aging: <https://www.ncoa.org/wpcontent/uploads/Suicide.Prevention.Webinar.Slides1.pdf>