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# What Older Adults Need to Know

ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

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# George Eastman invented the Kodak camera, which helped make photography available to the public.

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His company, Eastman Kodak, grew rapidly and made him extremely wealthy, but he didn't hold on to his riches for himself. It's estimated he contributed nearly \$100 million of his fortune to various charitable causes during his lifetime.

By all outside accounts, [Eastman's life was nearly picture perfect](#): He founded and ran an extremely successful company, and he contributed to an array of philanthropic causes. However, on March 14, 1932, when he was 77 years old, he got a small group of friends together to discuss how he wanted to divide his estate, then excused himself and shot himself in the heart.

He never married or had children, so he left a note for his friends reading "My work is done. Why wait?"

What wasn't widely known about Eastman, though, was that he suffered from a nerve disorder, which caused him severe pain and limited his mobility — likely causing him to give up his favorite hobby of cycling. He also suffered from severe diabetes. It's possible these conditions limited his social interactions and caused him to develop depression, which may or may not have led him to end his life.

While many people associate suicide with younger people, the truth is suicide rates are particularly high among older men, with [men above age 85 having the highest rate of suicide in the United States](#).

Whether or not you realize it, [older adults are at increased risk of experiencing mental health issues like depression and anxiety](#). This is because, in addition to the usual life stressors we all experience, as you age you are more likely to experience things like health issues or chronic pain, bereavement or changes in socioeconomic status brought on by retirement.

## Men above the age of 85 have the highest rate of suicide in the United States.

It's estimated by the World Health Organization that [more than 20 percent of adults over 60 suffer from some kind of mental disorder](#). In this guide, we'll look at common mental issues that older adults may experience, symptoms to look out for and how you or someone you know can easily get help.

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## Depression in Older Adults



# Depression in Older Adults

It's normal to occasionally feel uneasy, sad or stressed about a change in life — like the death of a loved one or change in job status — but if these feelings last for longer than two weeks and/or begin to interfere with your daily life and ability to function, you could be experiencing depression.

Depression is not a normal part of the aging process. It's also not a sign of weakness. With treatment, it is possible to feel better.

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## TYPES OF DEPRESSION

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### MAJOR DEPRESSION

This kind of depression causes severe symptoms that usually interfere with your ability to eat, sleep, concentrate, work or enjoy life. You may only experience one episode of major depression, while others experience several episodes throughout their lives.



### PERSISTENT DEPRESSIVE DISORDER

This causes less severe symptoms than major depression, but symptoms last at least two years.



### MINOR DEPRESSION

This kind of depression has symptoms that are less severe than major depression and don't last as long as persistent depressive disorder.

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## SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

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Many times, depression can go undiagnosed in older adults because they do not experience sadness as their main symptom. Instead, you or someone you know may experience the following:

- **Loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy**
- **Persistent feelings of pessimism or hopelessness**
- **Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness**
- **Feeling fatigued or having decreased energy**
- **Difficulty sleeping, concentrating, making decisions or remembering things**
- **Unintended appetite or weight changes**
- **Thoughts of death, suicide or suicide attempts**
- **Aches or pains or digestive issues that are not related to a physical cause and do not improve with treatment**



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## Risk Factors for Depression

Depression can happen at any age and to anyone. However, you can be at higher risk of developing the condition if you:

- **Are female**
- **Are dealing with a chronic illness or have a disability**
- **Are lonely or socially isolated**
- **Don't get enough quality sleep**
- **Have a history of depression**
- **Have experienced a stressful life event like the death of a spouse, family member or friend, divorce or being a caretaker for someone with a chronic illness**



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# What can I do?

## Getting Help for Depression

### Get Help Now

If you're feeling suicidal or in crisis, help is available now.

Call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call 1-800-799-4889. If you'd rather chat online instead of call, visit [suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat)

If you're concerned about the symptoms you or a loved one are experiencing, it is important to get treatment. For many people, depression does not “go away on its own”, and there's no shame in seeking treatment. The first step in getting help is to talk to your doctor. He or she can review your medical history, talk with you about how you're feeling and rule out other medical conditions or medications that may cause similar symptoms.

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#### SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

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If you notice the following warning signs of suicide in yourself or a loved one, get help immediately either by calling the Suicide Prevention Lifeline or visiting your local emergency room:

- **Threatening or talking about wanting to hurt or kill themselves**
- **Talking or writing about death or suicide**
- **Looking for ways to harm or kill themselves like getting access to weapons or pills**



# Treatment Options

Once you've been diagnosed with depression, there are several treatment options available. Medications and psychotherapy are the main treatments most people use, and your doctor or mental health professional will work with you to create a personalized plan that addresses your unique situation.

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## OTHER WAYS TO DEAL WITH DEPRESSION

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There are [additional ways to deal with depression](#) that you can easily include in your daily activities. Try these:

- **Eating a balanced diet**
- **Getting 7-8 hours of sleep per night**
- **Getting into a routine, like waking up, eating and doing certain activities at the same times each day**
- **Getting some exercise. You don't have to embark on an intense workout, walking just a few times a week can have a benefit.**
- **Taking on some responsibilities. Though depression can make you feel like you don't want to do anything, having some responsibilities, whether that be taking care of a pet, volunteering or continuing to work can help give you a sense of accomplishment and ground you.**



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## Anxiety in Older Adults



# Anxiety in Older Adults

While most of us experience a spike in anxious thoughts or feelings before a big or stressful event like a wedding, giving a big presentation or moving to a new home, it's when these feelings become more frequent and involve everyday occurrences that anxiety becomes a problem. Like depression, experiencing a large amount of persistent anxiety is not a normal part of aging.

It's estimated that between 10 to 20 percent of older adults have an anxiety disorder, but it usually goes undiagnosed because you may be reluctant to recognize or even talk about your symptoms. However, untreated anxiety can lead to a variety of health problems including poor quality of life, poor physical health and cognitive impairment. If you're experiencing persistent feelings of anxiety, treatment is available.

**Between 10 to 20 percent  
of older adults have an  
anxiety disorder.**

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## TYPES OF ANXIETY

Anxiety manifests in many forms. Here's what to look for:

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### PHOBIAS

A phobia is an intense, irrational fear of a place, thing or an event that poses little to no threat. These can be more common among older adults due to the fear of death, dental procedures or disaster happening to the family. Thinking about or experiencing something you're phobic of can bring on symptoms like panic attacks or severe anxiety.

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### SOCIAL PHOBIA

This kind of phobia happens when you experience overwhelmingly anxious and self-conscious feelings in everyday social situations. You might experience a social phobia if you're embarrassed about not being able to remember names or events or are ashamed of your appearance because of an illness. People who suffer from social phobias are more likely to be isolated and have trouble keeping friends. Symptoms can include blushing, nausea, extreme sweating, difficulty talking.

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### GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)

GAD causes persistent worries about things where there is little or no cause. These could include worries over family problems, money, health concerns, or disaster. You may know you're worrying more than necessary and experience trouble relaxing, sleeping or concentrating. Other symptoms include fatigue, chest pains, muscle pain, irritability, nausea, or sweating.

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### POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD can develop after a traumatic event, but symptoms can emerge months or years after the event. With PTSD you may experience flashbacks, lose interest in things you once enjoyed, have difficulty sleeping and startle easily.

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### OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

Despite what you may see online and television shows, OCD involves much more than being neat or picky. The disorder involves persistent, upsetting thoughts that sufferers think they control by doing certain rituals. But OCD is uncommon, relative to other causes of anxiety, in older adults.

## **PANIC DISORDER**

If you have panic disorder, you may experience sudden attacks of terror where you might feel a pounding heart, sweating, nausea, dizziness or weakness. These attacks can occur at anytime — even while you're sleeping. While not common among older adults, some who deal with the disorder may refuse to be left alone or think they're having a heart attack or stroke.

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# Other Signs of an Anxiety Disorder

**Refusing to do routine activities or being preoccupied with routine**

**Avoiding social situations**

**Being preoccupied with safety**

**Poor sleep**

**Depression**

**Hoarding**

**Self medication with alcohol or other medicines**



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# What can I do?

## Getting Help for Anxiety

If you think you or someone you know could be suffering from an anxiety disorder, talk with your doctor. Anxiety is very treatable. Care may include medication, stress reduction techniques, and therapy.

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### ADDITIONAL WAYS TO COPE WITH ANXIETY

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You don't solely have to depend on medication to help you cope with your disorder. In addition to therapy, there are ways to reduce or increase your coping ability. Try these:

- **Talk about your worries or what you're experiencing with a family member, friend or spiritual leader you trust.**
- **Exercise**
- **Avoid things that can exacerbate feelings of anxiety like caffeine, smoking, over the counter cold medications, alcohol, over-eating and illegal drugs.**
- **Try meditation, prayer, deep breathing or other stress reduction techniques**



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## Isolation or Loneliness & Mental Health



# Isolation or Loneliness & Mental Health

These days isolation and loneliness are being viewed as a public health problem. That's because more than 8 million adults aged 50 and over experience isolation. What's the effect of isolation on your health?

The AARP estimates that being isolated is [the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes per day](#).

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## HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME ISOLATED?

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Most often, isolation is not the cause of a single event. Rather it's the cumulative effect of several changes that can commonly affect older adults. These include:

- **Retiring from driving and not having a reliable mode of public or other transportation**
- **Experiencing frailty, poor health, mental illness or a loss of hearing**
- **Retiring, losing a partner or becoming a caregiver**
- **Experiencing a lack of opportunities to engage in your community**
- **Living in impoverished or rural areas**

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## WAYS TO REDUCE OR PREVENT ISOLATION

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### TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES

Use volunteer-based ride programs or ask a family member or friend for rides



### POOR HEALTH

Falls prevention programs, learn how to manage any chronic diseases



### LIFE TRANSITIONS OR LOSS

Take advantage of support groups, senior center programs, lifelong learning opportunities



### AGEISM, LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS

Take advantage of senior center programs, join intergenerational programs, participate in lifelong learning



### RURAL LIVING, POVERTY

Learn how to use and connect through technology

## How do I know if Isolation is Affecting Me or a Loved One?

[TAKE THIS QUICK QUIZ TO FIND OUT MORE](#)

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Dealing with Grief



# Dealing with Grief

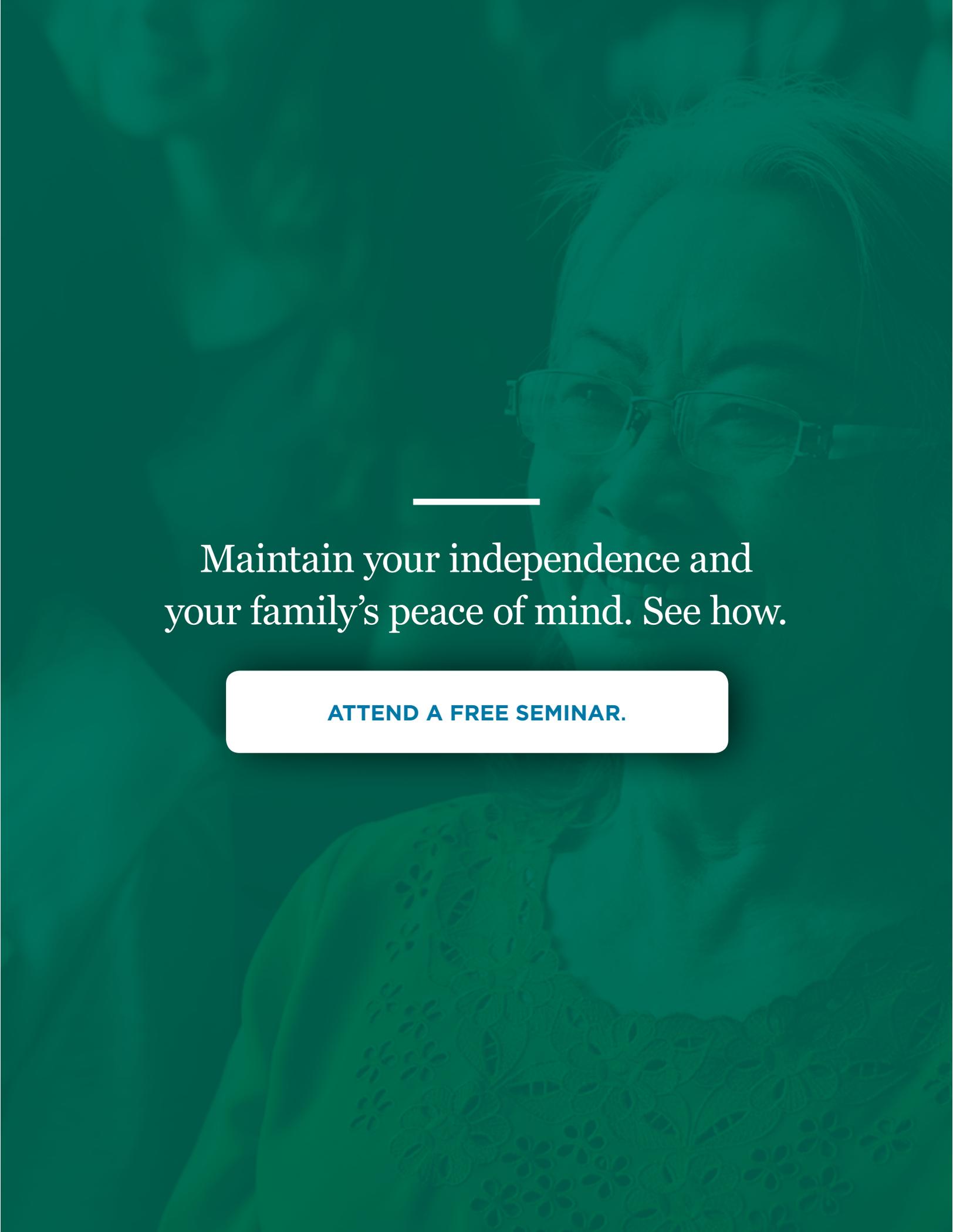
Grief, or feelings of sadness, fear or anger, after the death of a loved one is a normal response to death. There's no one way to grieve, and you may find you grieve differently than others. The important thing, as with all other mental health issues, is to not ignore your feelings.

Take advantage of support groups, family or friends or speak with a mental health professional until you're able to manage your grief on your own. You can find support groups at local community centers, churches or, if your loved one was in hospice, a nursing home or a hospital. These facilities usually have resources on hand as well.

**The important thing,  
as with all other mental  
health issues, is to not  
ignore your feelings.**

Grief can certainly affect your mental health, however, it can also make you feel physically unwell. Though it may seem difficult, try to keep doing things you enjoy, make sure you eat a healthy diet and get adequate sleep. If family or friends offer to provide companionship, take them up on the offer, and delay making any major life decisions until you are feeling better.

Whether you or someone you know is experiencing depression, anxiety, grief or isolation, it's important to remember that treatment and solutions are available. If you're struggling with your mental health, start by talking to your doctor or someone you trust.



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Maintain your independence and  
your family's peace of mind. See how.

**ATTEND A FREE SEMINAR.**