



Loving Arms
Elder Care

IS IT DEMENTIA OR DEPRESSION?

Never assume that a loss of mental sharpness is just a normal sign of old age. Dementia and depression are both common problems among the elderly, and can share many of the same symptoms making it difficult to tell the two apart. There are, however, some differences that can help you distinguish between the two.



What is Depression? Depression is a mental health disorder that involves both mind and body. It can include constant feelings of sadness or irritability, decreased pleasure in formerly enjoyable activities, inability to concentrate or make decisions, or feelings of hopelessness and guilt. Physically, depressed people suffer from a loss of energy and may experience a change in appetite, with weight gain or loss. They may also see a change in sleeping patterns, whether difficulty in sleeping or sleeping too much.

What is Dementia? Dementia is a generic term that may apply to any of a number of neurodegenerative diseases. It is characterized by the progressive and persistent loss of cognitive functions, including memory and language, as well as personality and emotional impairment.

Whether dementia or depression, prompt diagnosis and treatment are key. If it's depression, memory, concentration, and energy will bounce back with treatment. Treatment for dementia will also improve you or your loved one's quality of life.



There's no single test that can differentiate depression from dementia. But some behavior clues may help the doctor make an educated assessment. When discussing depression and dementia, there are several different classifications that help to distinguish one from the other.

Memory: People who are depressed may have trouble concentrating. They may even suffer occasional memory lapses, which can make their mood worse. People with dementia consistently have trouble storing new information, such as the recent visit of a close relative or what they ate for lunch. They may not remember eating lunch at all.

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Orientation: Most people who are depressed generally know with whom they're speaking, what time and day it is, and where they are. People with dementia tend to be confused about some or all of this.

Language difficulties: Dementia patients often have mild to severe language problems that progress throughout the disease. For example, difficulty remembering simple terms such as "apple" might be difficult, and using the wrong words or speech is common. Depressed individuals do not have language problems. Even though depression might slow speech, language skills are usually quite normal.



Behavioral differences: With depression, there is a constant negative spin placed on events or things in daily life, such as memory lapses that might occur. On the other hand, dementia patients might simply try to cover up or give an excuse for a memory lapse that occurred. Hiding memory problems is especially seen in early stages of dementia where the individual might be in denial or disbelief.

Use of familiar objects: Not a problem for people with depression. Someone with dementia may not remember how to perform routine tasks, such as how to tie their shoes or button buttons.

Whether dementia or depression, it is important to consult with a doctor or other qualified professional to determine the proper course of treatment. The treatments for depression and dementia are different based upon the type of disorder or disease. Depression is commonly treated with a combination of antidepressant medications and psychotherapy. Dementia usually cannot be reversed, but there are treatments that can help slow its progression and improve quality of life.