

## Depression vs. Dementia

A loss of mental sharpness could be more than a condition of aging. It could be a sign of depression or dementia, both of which can occur in older adults. In some cases, a person may have both depression and dementia. Depression can have such an impact on a person's thinking that it's sometimes mistaken for dementia. Since depression and dementia share many similar symptoms, including memory problems, ability to reason, slow speech and movements, and a lack of motivation, it can be difficult to recognize the differences.

Diagnosing depression in the context of dementia is often difficult due to the similarity of symptoms. It is further complicated if the person with dementia is unable to communicate their situation. There are, however, some differences that can help you distinguish between the two.

### Is it Depression or Dementia?

#### Symptoms of Depression

- Mental decline is relatively rapid
- Onset of sad mood, does not improve with stimulation
- Knows the correct time, date, and where he or she is
- Difficulty concentrating
- Language and motor skills are slow, but normal
- Notices or worries (preoccupied) about memory problems
- Sleep changes over a few

#### Symptoms of Dementia

- Mental decline happens slowly
- Mood is normal most of the time, unhappiness is reactive to situations and may go up and down
- Confused and disoriented; becomes lost in familiar locations
- Difficulty with short-term memory
- Writing, speaking, and motor skills are impaired
- Doesn't notice memory problems or seem to care
- Gradual disruption of sleep – wake cycle due to brain changes of dementia

Symptoms of depression that are much less common in dementia alone include consistent sadness, hopelessness, marked morning mood worsening, feelings of worthlessness or expressions of guilt (excessive or inappropriate guilt), recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation or suicidal actions.

Whether a person's mood or ability to think is caused by dementia or depression it is important to seek advice from your health care provider. If it is Depression, memory, concentration, and energy are likely to improve with treatment. Treatment for Dementia may also enhance you and/or your loved one's quality of life.