



CRAWFORD COUNTY
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL



Senior Life
Solutions®



CHRONIC PAIN AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH



Chronic pain can affect nearly every part of daily life. It may interfere with sleep, mobility, appetite, independence, relationships and activities a person once enjoyed. Over time, these changes can also affect emotional health.

The National Institute on Aging defines chronic pain as pain that lasts for three months or longer. Common causes among older adults include arthritis, diabetes, shingles, cancer and previous injuries or surgeries. Ongoing pain may be related to anxiety or depression, and it can make social activities and daily responsibilities harder to manage.

During Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month, it is important to recognize the connection between physical and emotional well-being.

When Pain Begins to Affect Emotional Health

Everyone experiences pain differently. Some older adults may openly discuss how they are feeling, while others may focus on physical symptoms or changes in their routines.

Depression can appear differently in older adults. Sadness may be present, although some people primarily experience a loss of interest, low energy, sleep changes, physical complaints or difficulty concentrating. Depression is treatable, and counseling, medication or a combination of treatments may help.

See the next page for more.

Signs that an older adult may need additional support include:

- Withdrawing from family, friends or community activities
- Losing interest in hobbies or usual routines
- Experiencing ongoing sadness, anxiety, irritability or hopelessness
- Struggling with sleep, appetite, concentration or energy
- Increasing alcohol use or taking medication differently than prescribed
- Expressing that they feel trapped, helpless or like a burden
- Talking about death or suicide

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies serious illness, including chronic pain, as one factor associated with increased suicide risk. Suicide risk develops through a combination of personal, relationship, community and societal factors. Changes in mood, behavior, safety or daily functioning deserve prompt attention.

Treating the Whole Person

Pain and emotional health should be discussed together. An older adult experiencing chronic pain can tell a health care provider:

- Where the pain occurs and how long it has been present
- How pain affects sleep, movement and daily activities
- Whether mood, energy or social participation has changed
- Any prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, or supplements
- Which treatments have helped or caused side effects
- Whether they have experienced thoughts of death, suicide or self-harm

A personalized care plan may involve a medical evaluation, medication review, physical therapy, appropriate movement, counseling, sleep support and strategies for staying connected with others. Medication changes should be made with a qualified health care professional, especially when several prescriptions or health conditions are involved.

Family members and caregivers can help by listening, maintaining regular contact, assisting with appointments and sharing concerning changes with the care team. Asking about both physical pain and emotional distress gives health care professionals a fuller understanding of the person's needs.

Help Is Available

Statements about wanting to die, having no reason to live or feeling like a burden should be taken seriously.

Call or text **988** to reach the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**. The Lifeline offers free, confidential support for people experiencing emotional distress, mental health concerns or suicidal thoughts. Family members and caregivers may also contact 988 when they are concerned about someone else. In an immediate, life-threatening situation, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

WE CAN HELP.

Our hospital-based outpatient program is designed to meet the unique needs of older adults experiencing depression and/or anxiety related to life changes that are often associated with aging or a chronic diagnosis. Anyone can make a referral to our program, including self-referrals, provider referrals, or community consultations.

Call us today at (712) 265-2800