

Depression increases risk of death in older adults

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As we age, we become more likely to experience symptoms of depression. Research shows that depression's symptoms can be linked to a higher risk for death. Yet often, older adults' symptoms of depression may be missed by healthcare professionals.

What's more, symptoms of [depression](#) have been linked to [heart disease](#) and stroke in middle-aged and older adults. Researchers suggest that the depression-heart disease link could play a role in the increased risk of [death](#) among older adults who have symptoms of depression. There's also a known link between depression and deaths from cancer and falls in older adults. These connections might contribute to an increased risk of death for older adults, researchers suggest.

Since depression symptoms change over time, it's possible that studying those symptoms during an older adult's doctor visits could provide more information. To learn more, a research team designed a study to investigate the role depression symptoms play in an increased risk of death over time. The team also examined the role heart disease and stroke play in the link between depression symptoms and increased risk of death. Their study was published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

The researchers used information from the Three-City Study, a French study that investigated dementia, heart disease, and stroke in people aged 65 and older during five healthcare visits the participants made over 10 years.

At the start of the study, 16 percent of 9,294 participants had a history of heart disease. Most participants were around 73 years old; 37 percent were men.

About 23 percent of participants had symptoms of depression when the study began (28 percent of women and 13 percent of men). Almost 7 percent were taking medication for their depression. At three follow-up visits, the participants were tested again for symptoms of depression.

When the participants were monitored for depression symptoms at several visits over time, [symptoms of depression](#) were linked to an increased risk for death, including death from heart disease and stroke. However, those diseases explained only a small percentage of the deaths associated with depression symptoms over time.

The researchers said their study suggested that, for [older adults](#) living with depression, preventing heart disease may not be the only factor that will help prevent or delay death. Interestingly, antidepressants were not associated with an increased risk of death in this study.

More information: Renaud Péquignot et al, Depression Increases the Risk of Death Independently From Vascular Events in Elderly Individuals: The Three-City Study, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.15731](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.15731)

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