

## SENIORS LOSING INTEREST IN LIFE: 7 WAYS TO HELP WITH ANHEDONIA



Sometimes, older adults begin to withdraw from favorite activities and seem to lose interest in life. This could be anhedonia, a common symptom of depression. [SeniorLiving](#) explains the signs to watch for and shares 7 ways to help seniors who are experiencing anhedonia.

Has your older adult started withdrawing from their favorite activities?

Do they say, 'I don't feel like it,' or express disinterest when you propose an activity they used to enjoy?

**These could be signs of anhedonia.**

Someone who's experiencing anhedonia has lost interest in activities they used to enjoy and has a decreased ability to feel pleasure.

Studies suggest that [anhedonia is often overlooked](#) in older adults even though it's a common symptom of depression and other mental health conditions.

### Symptoms of anhedonia include:

- Withdrawing from social activities
- A lack of relationships or withdrawal from previous relationships
- Negative feelings toward themselves and others
- Reduced emotional abilities

If your older adult might be showing signs of anhedonia, we share 7 ways to help them improve their mood and find more enjoyment in life.

### 1. Empathize with how they're feeling

An older adult may feel a loss of control and see themselves as a burden rather than a contributing family member. This can lead to emotional shutdown and isolation.

One way to help is to empathize with them. Pay attention to their behavior. Do they look troubled? Is there something that's holding them back? If yes, have an open conversation with them about it. Empathizing with what they're going through might help them feel

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comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings with you. And talking about it with you can help them work through and reduce those feelings of [isolation or depression](#).

### 2. Encourage healthy sleeping habits

Someone who is anxious often finds it tough to fall asleep or stay asleep. That's typically because their mind isn't at ease or is full of worrying thoughts.

Unfortunately, this sleep deprivation leads to fatigue and loss of motivation, which can make anhedonia worse. Getting a good night's sleep helps reduce the damaging effects of anhedonia. Plus, healthy sleeping habits help improve cognitive function and boost energy levels.

*Improve your older adult's sleep by:*

- *Working with them to create a regular sleep schedule and encouraging them to stick to it.*
- *Reducing exposure to screens in the evening, especially two hours before bedtime. To keep them entertained and relaxed, try replacing screen time with board games, puzzles, reading or audiobooks, or listening to their favorite music.*
- *Preparing a lighter meal for dinner. And for some, having some warm milk before bed can be relaxing and sleep-inducing.*
- *Avoiding strenuous activities like exercising in the evening.*

### 3. Encourage regular exercise

Everyone benefits from regular exercise, especially someone who's showing signs of anhedonia. Exercise can help combat stress, improve mood and sleep quality, and reduce joint pain or mobility issues. Exercises and physical activity are known to release 'feel-good' hormones that improve overall mood and improve symptoms of depression. They also improve appetite and digestion.

Encourage your older adult to participate in pleasant physical activities like going for short morning walks or doing a simple daily [exercise routine](#). Regular chores that suit their ability level and spending time with any children in the household can also help keep them active and add purpose or meaning to their days.

### 4. Add serotonin-rich foods to their regular diet

Anhedonia is considered a sign of depression, which is associated with [low levels of serotonin](#), a neurotransmitter that's linked to mood. Food plays a significant role in health — physical as well as mental and emotional.

Making small changes like eating a serotonin-rich diet can help [improve mood and fight depression](#), helping to decrease anhedonia. Add foods like fresh fruits, yogurt, fish, whole-grain bread, spinach, and dark chocolate to boost your older adult's mood. You may also want to talk with their doctor or nutritionist to plan a diet that improves their overall health and mood.

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### 5. Encourage them to socialize

Seniors with anhedonia may find it difficult to socialize with friends and strangers alike. This can make them feel lonely, worsening their condition and triggering negative thoughts. Encourage your older adult to socialize and help them find something to look forward to each day.

Depending on their interests and abilities, that might mean joining a club focused on a hobby, participating in an exercise class, taking a class with group discussion. Or, set up a regular exchange of calls, emails, or letters with friends and family. Even if these activities are happening online due to the pandemic, they're still great ways to socialize and do something fun.

Some older adults might benefit from considering a move to a senior housing community that would provide a community and organized activities. In addition, senior centers also offer group activities that encourage everyone to come together and make meaningful connections.

If your older adult is reluctant to participate in group activities or be a part of a community, try accompanying them for a few events. Your support can help them feel more comfortable in a new situation and rediscover the joy of socializing and making new friends.

### 6. Focus on life's positives

Life is filled with both happy and sad moments. With anhedonia, it may be challenging for your older adult to focus on the good times. But noticing or recalling positive events is a way to bring a smile to your adult's face. Help your older adult reminisce about happy memories by looking at videos and photographs together. Ask them to share funny stories related to their life experiences. Create an album or time capsule, something that encourages them to relive happy moments and find ways to stay positive through tough times.

### 7. Consider therapy or counseling

Seniors with anhedonia may find it difficult to recognize and work through their emotions. This might make them frustrated, irritated, and angry with themselves. Offering to lend a listening ear is a great way to help, but sometimes, getting help from an expert like a [therapist or trained counselor](#) or a faith leader can make an even bigger difference. Advice and guidance from an expert can help them understand and process their emotions.

Recommended for you:

- [When Depression and Dementia Collide](#)
- [4 Ways Seniors and Caregivers Can Prevent and Manage Seasonal Depression](#)
- [4 Sources of Affordable Counseling Services to Reduce Caregiver Stress](#)

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