

Social Support Deficit as a Risk Factor for Depression

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An individual's social network plays an important role in assisting the elderly individual in maintaining positive self-care behaviors.^[2] Social support impacts the psychological well-being of the elderly person with stress-related problems, mental health issues, and chronic illness. Self-care behaviors are an integral component to managing disease onset, impact, process, and long-term prognosis. Social support can positively influence self-care behaviors through assistance with instrumental activities associated with symptom management, as well as activities associated with maintaining illness-related treatment regimens.^[2]

Social support influences health-related quality of life, however, this association is strongly mediated by depressive mood.^[13] For example, in Parkinson's disease, morbidity and mortality are related not only to progressive motor impairments but also to the emergence of depression, and cognitive impairment.¹² Depression is especially likely in those who have a greater number of physical impairments as well as those with more social support deficits.^[11]

A number of researchers posit a multifaceted model of depression, with cognition, mood, and somatic components of depression that impinge on elderly perceptions of social support and social demand.^[6] It is important to understand how the aged person perceives the availability, quality, and quantity of support. It is not the disability, but often, the number of ailments or the level of impairment that interacts with poor social support, making depression likely. For those with a large number of impairments, social supports play an important role in reducing the association between physical impairment and depression in older adults.^[11] Perceived emotional and tangible support and the presence and availability of social networks lessened depression in patients with heart failure.³ Social support has a positive relationship on self-care in the areas of managing related behaviors such as seeking treatment for troubling symptoms, assisting with the maintenance of treatment regimens and through participation in the decision-making process related to the management of symptoms.^[2]

The influence of social support on health-related quality of life is mediated by ones mood. Some people are cognitively vulnerable to depression. Depressed

individuals tend to view the world, themselves, and others negatively.^[6,7,8] Over time, the depressed person who continually focuses on life's negative aspects can make nondepressed individuals uncomfortable, so people may further distance themselves from the person.^[1,4,9,10] A negative cognitive style is often common in depression. Loneliness and social support significantly correlate with depression.^[5]

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