



# Unmasking Depression

By: Jennifer Davis

**This illness may show up in different disguises.**

**The holidays can be full of family, friends, food, and fun.** But never-ending shopping lists and obligations can create stress and trigger a bout of depression in people prone to it – including many who have arthritis. A 2012 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one-third of people with arthritis also have depression or anxiety.

**SUBTLE SYMPTOMS** – While some symptoms are well known – like persistent sadness and changes to sleep, activity, and eating patterns – a variety of more subtle symptoms may be harder to recognize. For example, people with arthritis and related conditions may experience increased pain (beyond their joints), including back pain, headaches, and stomach pains.

John M. Davis III, MD, a rheumatologist at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, believes depression is also responsible for an inadequate response to disease-modifying therapies in some people with inflammatory arthritis. “I think depression is a key driver of persistent pain,” he says.

Other signs of depression include self-medicating with alcohol or prescription pain medications or changes in mood – such as withdrawal or being quick to anger. Depression can also lead to difficulty concentrating, which may first be noticeable at work (or school) as deadlines are missed.

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR** – Depression in older adults often goes unrecognized and untreated because it can be mistaken for other symptoms of aging, such as memory difficulties, personality changes, and not wanting to leave the house.

Recognizing these less common symptoms is especially important for people with arthritis because depression often translates to more pain and a decreased ability to function.

“I do believe that early treatment is important to optimize control of depression and reduce its impact on pain, ability to participate in activities, sleep disturbances, and difficulty with social and work activities,” Dr. Davis says.

Source: Arthritis Today

[www.commonhealth.virginia.gov](http://www.commonhealth.virginia.gov)

The contents of the CommonHealth weekly emails may be reprinted from an outside resource in the area of health, safety, and wellness and is intended to provide one or more views on a topic. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Virginia, CommonHealth, or any particular agency and are offered for educational purposes. If you have questions or concerns about this article, please email us at [wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov](mailto:wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov)