

I C O P E

INTEGRATED CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

PSYCHOLOGICAL
CAPACITY



Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

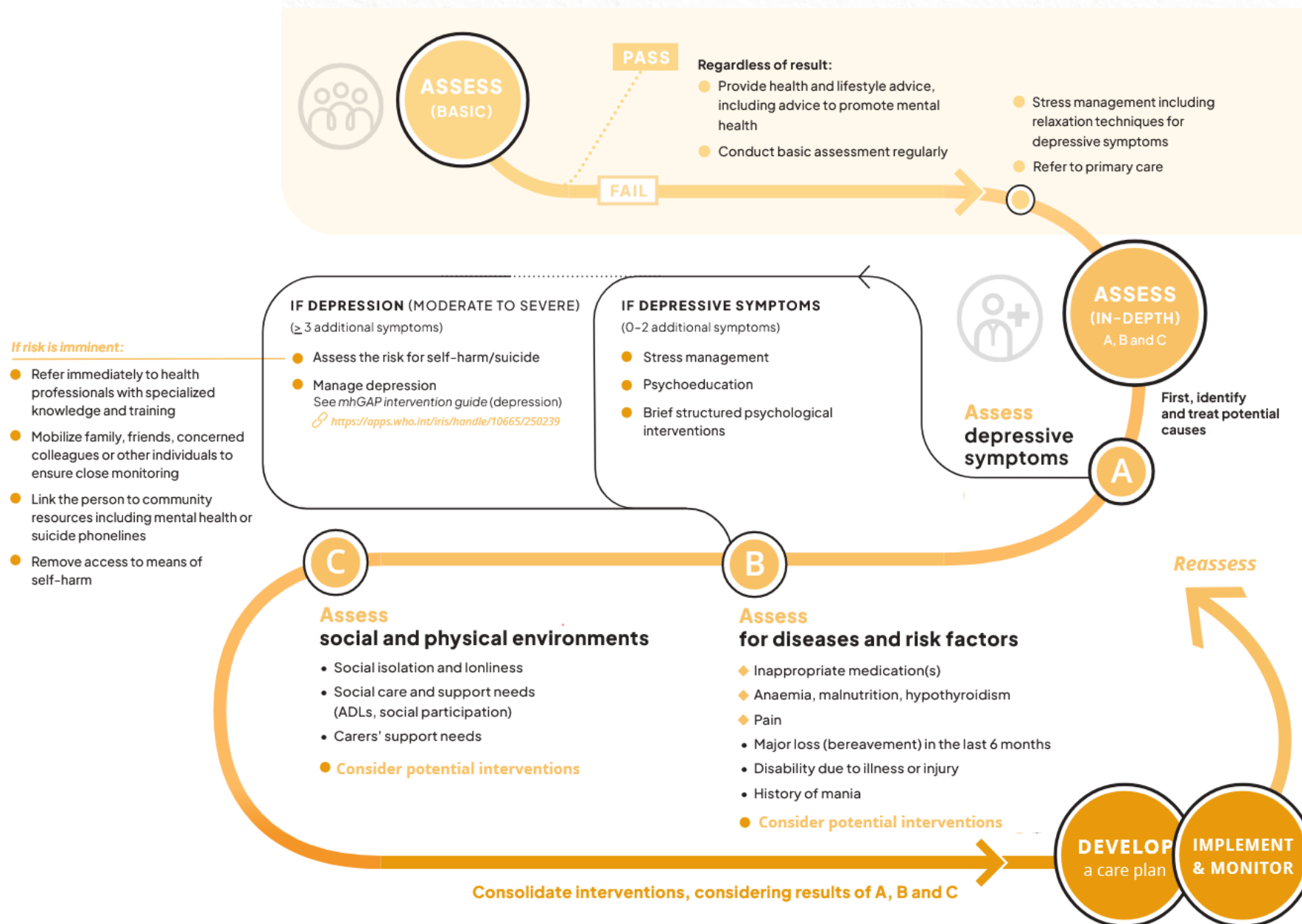
- Explain the care pathways for managing depressive symptoms in older people, also involving community stakeholders.
- Describe the methods used to assess the mood of older people.
- Identify conditions associated with depressive symptoms and depression in older persons.
- Outline interventions for managing depressive symptoms of older people.



Understanding Depressive Symptoms

- Depressive symptoms refer to the presence of two or more symptoms of depression lasting for at least two weeks. These symptoms do not meet the criteria for a diagnosis of depression.
- Depressive symptoms are more common among older individuals with chronic and disabling conditions, those experiencing social isolation, or carers facing demanding responsibilities.
- Comprehensive management approaches should focus on addressing the underlying issues contributing to these symptoms.
- Depressive symptoms are a clinical manifestation of one of the dimensions of psychological capacity. Other dimensions include anxiety, personality traits, coping mechanisms, and mastery.

Care pathway to manage depressive symptoms





Assessment of Depressive Symptoms

When a person reports **at least one of the core symptoms** (i.e., feeling down, being depressed or hopeless, lack of interest or pleasure), conduct an in-depth assessment.

ASK: "Over the past two weeks, have you been bothered by any of the following problems?"

- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Fatigue or low energy.
- Changes in appetite.
- Negative self-perception or feelings of failure.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Changes in physical movement (slowed or restless).
- Thoughts of self-harm or death.



- If a person has **less than two** additional symptoms, he/she is considered to have depressive symptoms.

- If a person has **three or more** additional symptoms, he/she may present a diagnosis of (moderate to severe) depression.



Health and lifestyle advice



Taking regular physical activity



Getting good quality sleep



Eating a healthy and balanced diet



Maintaining social connection



Stress reduction techniques

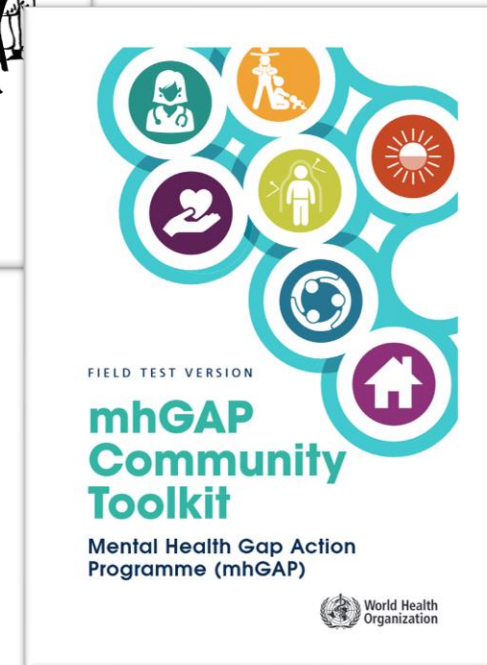
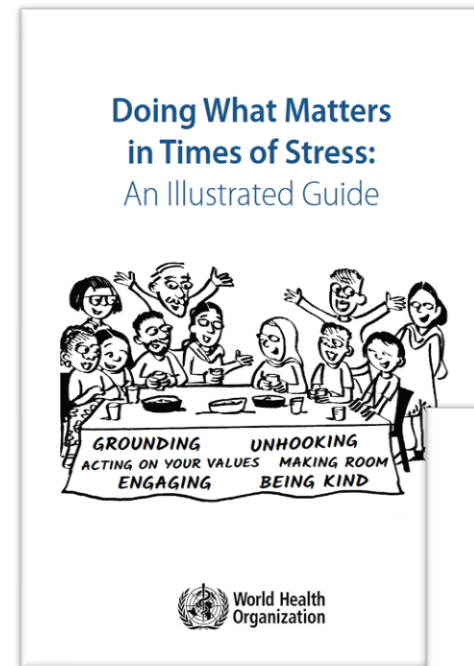


Avoiding and reducing use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances



Community-based health care

- Community health workers can offer **stress management** guidance through both self-help and guided methods, including support for caregivers.
- Effective strategies may involve physical exercise, restorative sleep, and spending quality time with loved ones, all tailored to individual preferences.
- Quick techniques like deep breathing, stretching, and muscle relaxation can also minimise the effects of stress.
- Daily practice strengthens resilience and helps establish routines for difficult times.





Interventions to improve psychological capacity

If depressive symptoms

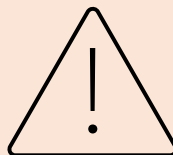
- Stress management
- Psychoeducation
- Brief structured psychological interventions

If depression (moderate-to-severe)

- Assess the risk for self-harm/suicide
- Manage depression (*mhGAP intervention guide*)

If risk for self-harm is imminent

- *Refer immediately to specialised care*
- *Mobilise family, friends... to ensure close monitoring*
- *Remove access to means of self-harm*
- *Link the person to community resources, including mental health or suicide phonedines*



When special knowledge and training are needed

- Imminent risk of self-harm or suicide
- Management of bipolar disorder or psychosis
- Provision of structured psychological interventions
- Management of chronic pain





Interventions for diseases and risk factors



Inappropriate medication(s)

Review medications and withdraw or prescribe alternatives.



Anemia, malnutrition, hypothyroidism

Management of diseases.



Pain

Assess and manage pain.



Recent loss (bereavement)

Advice for culturally appropriate mourning processes.



History of mania

See the mhGAP intervention guide (psychoses).



Disability due to illness or injury

Advice on stress reduction and strengthening social support.

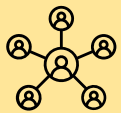


Interventions for social and physical environments



Social isolation and loneliness

Identify and tackle loneliness and social isolation.



Social care and support needs

Support tasks of daily living.
Encourage participation in community activities.



Carers' support needs

Provide psychoeducation and psychosocial support.

Summary

- To assess psychological capacity, consider using questions that explore the core symptoms of depression.
- Be aware of conditions that may be associated with depressive symptoms in older persons, such as polypharmacy, anemia, malnutrition, hypothyroidism, and chronic pain.
- Important to promote Social engagement to avoid isolation and loneliness
- The management of depressive symptoms follows a stepped care approach, and includes:
 - Stress management
 - Psychoeducation
 - Brief, structured psychological interventions



References

Psychological interventions implementation manual: integrating evidence-based psychological interventions into existing services. World Health Organization (Geneva, Switzerland), 2024. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/376208>.

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Field test version: mhGAP community toolkit: Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP). World Health Organization (Geneva, Switzerland), 2019. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/328742>.

Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) guideline for mental, neurological and substance use disorders. World Health Organization (Geneva, Switzerland), 2023. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/374250>.

Doing what matters in times of stress: an illustrated guide. World Health Organization (Geneva, Switzerland), 2020. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/331901>.