

# Psychological Treatment of Late-Life Depression

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## KEYWORDS

- Late-life depression • Geriatric depression • Psychiatric interventions
- Cognitive behavioral therapy

## KEY POINTS

- Psychological interventions are effective for late-life depression.
- There is little evidence that one type of intervention is more efficacious than another.
- More research is needed to examine moderators of treatment, including age, depression severity, medical illness, and cognitive impairment.

## INTRODUCTION

Major depressive disorder (MDD) affects up to 5% of community-dwelling individuals age 55 and older<sup>1</sup> and up to 15% have clinically significant depressive symptoms.<sup>2</sup> Prevalence rates for depression are higher in specialty settings, including primary care (5%–10%)<sup>3</sup> and residential care (10%–50%).<sup>4</sup> Evidence-based guidelines for treatment recommend antidepressants and psychotherapy as the first-line treatment for moderate to severe depression in older adults<sup>5</sup> and this appears to somewhat reflect what occurs in clinical practice. An American Psychiatric Association poll<sup>6</sup> reported that 52% of providers used a combination of medication and therapy and 39% reported prescribing medication only. There is some indication that older adults may prefer psychological treatment compared with pharmacologic treatments,<sup>7,8</sup> and a recent meta-analysis reported that psychotherapy may be more beneficial than antidepressants for older adults with dysthymia and minor depression.<sup>9</sup>

This review examines the evidence for the following psychological interventions in the treatment of late-life depression: cognitive and behavioral therapy, problem-solving therapy, reminiscence and life review therapy, brief psychodynamic therapy, and interpersonal therapy. Following the review of psychological interventions for

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Disclosures: None.

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Psychiatr Clin N Am 36 (2013) 561–575

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2013.08.005>

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| Abbreviations: Psychological Treatment of Late-Life Depression |                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Comm                                                           | Community                                                      |
| RDC                                                            | Research Diagnostic Criteria                                   |
| MDD                                                            | Major depressive disorder                                      |
| BDI                                                            | Beck Depression Inventory                                      |
| BT                                                             | Behavior therapy                                               |
| CT                                                             | Cognitive therapy                                              |
| BPD                                                            | Brief psychodynamic therapy                                    |
| WLC                                                            | Waitlist control                                               |
| Indiv                                                          | Individual                                                     |
| SADS                                                           | Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia             |
| HRSD                                                           | Hamilton rating scale for depression                           |
| GDS                                                            | Geriatric Depression Scale                                     |
| BSI                                                            | Brief Symptom Inventory                                        |
| tx                                                             | Treatment                                                      |
| biblio                                                         | Bibliotherapy                                                  |
| Unk                                                            | Unknown                                                        |
| depx                                                           | Depression                                                     |
| bsl                                                            | Baseline                                                       |
| CBT                                                            | Cognitive behavior therapy                                     |
| Desip                                                          | Desipramine                                                    |
| EDS                                                            | Edinburgh Depression Scale                                     |
| CIDI                                                           | Composite International Diagnostic Interview                   |
| HTN                                                            | Hypertension                                                   |
| HLD                                                            | Hyperlipidemia                                                 |
| DISH                                                           | Depression Interview and Structured Hamilton                   |
| HDI                                                            | Hamilton Depression Inventory                                  |
| TAU                                                            | Treatment as usual                                             |
| AGECAT                                                         | Automated Geriatric Examination for Computer Assisted Taxonomy |
| TC                                                             | Talking control                                                |
| IPT                                                            | Interpersonal therapy                                          |
| SCID                                                           | Structured clinical interview                                  |
| inpt                                                           | Inpatient                                                      |
| IPC                                                            | Interpersonal counseling                                       |
| PST                                                            | Problem solving therapy                                        |
| RT                                                             | Reminiscence therapy                                           |
| HSCL-D                                                         | Hopkins Symptom Checklist Depression Scale                     |
| Exec Dys                                                       | Executive dysfunction                                          |
| ST                                                             | Supportive therapy                                             |
| PC                                                             | Primary care                                                   |
| CBP                                                            | Community-based psychotherapy                                  |
| DFDs                                                           | Depression-free days                                           |
| Med Ill                                                        | Medically ill                                                  |
| SRT                                                            | Structured reminiscence therapy                                |
| USRT                                                           | Unstructured reminiscence therapy                              |
| CESD                                                           | Center for Epidemiologic Studies for Depression                |
| LRT                                                            | Life review therapy                                            |
| NT                                                             | Narrative therapy                                              |

late-life depression, a clinical vignette is presented to provide an example of cognitive behavioral therapy in an older adult with late-life depression.

### Methods

Studies were selected through literature searches of PubMed and PsychINFO using combinations of the following key words: cognitive behavior therapy,

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