

TO YOUR HEALTH

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The Nocebo Effect and Its Impact on Health

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Everyone's heard about the placebo effect, where positive expectations enhance health. It's been widely studied and shown to have a significant positive impact on an individual's well being. Less well known is the "nocebo effect". The nocebo effect, called by some "the placebo effect's evil twin", refers to the phenomenon where the occurrence of a harmful event stems from consciously or subconsciously expecting it. Expectations are critical to our health and well-being. When someone "expects" to feel sick they're more likely to "actually" feel sick due to the nocebo effect.

Older adults may be more likely to experience nocebo responses due to factors such as cognitive decline, multiple health conditions, and heightened sensitivity to medical interventions. Older adults face unique challenges in healthcare, including polypharmacy (the use of multiple medications), chronic illnesses, and the emotional impacts of aging.

The nocebo effect often arises when patients have negative expectations about a treatment or medical intervention. For example, if a person is informed that a medication may

cause mild side effects like dizziness or nausea, they may begin to experience these symptoms, even if the medication itself is not responsible. In some cases, the belief that a medication will make them feel worse can result in the very symptoms they fear.

At its core, the nocebo effect works by leveraging the power of suggestion. When individuals are told to expect negative effects, their brains can generate symptoms based on those expectations. This response is similar to the placebo effect, where positive expectations lead to real improvements in health. However, with the nocebo effect, the psychological belief in harm can manifest as real physical or mental distress. This effect can become a vicious cycle where fears of worsening health or new symptoms can increase anxiety, which in turn can worsen physical health or create new concerns.

Chronic stress and anxiety about health can lead to physical issues like headaches, gastrointestinal discomfort, fatigue, or even exacerbate existing medical conditions such as hypertension or heart disease. This creates a challenge for healthcare providers and caregivers, as they must navigate the delicate balance between informing patients of potential risks while minimizing the possibility of triggering nocebo responses.



Clear communication and trust with your healthcare provider is essential. Being well informed about the psychological aspects of health, how negative thinking can influence physical well-being, can empower a more proactive approach to managing expectations and improving health outcomes. The stronger the trust, the less likely patients are to fall victim to harmful expectations. Involving family members and caregivers in the conversation can also help patients feel more secure and confident in their treatment plans.

The nocebo effect is a powerful reminder of the mind-body connection. By understanding and addressing the psychological factors that influence health, older adults can achieve better, more positive outcomes in their healthcare journeys. By focusing on reassurance and providing positive, supportive information, healthcare providers can help reduce the negative expectations that may contribute to nocebo effects. For instance, instead of highlighting all the potential side effects of a medication, doctors can emphasize the benefits

and likelihood of minimal adverse reactions. Patients can be proactive by asking for open communication from their healthcare provider.



When starting a new medication avoid reading all of the possible side effects listed on the literature that is required to accompany all prescriptions. Instead, focus on the intended benefit of the medication and contact your healthcare provider to discuss any side effects you might encounter. Some adverse effects can be serious and should not be ignored, others might be mild and resolve after the first few doses. With proper communication, support, and education, the harmful effects of the nocebo effect can be reduced, leading to improved quality of life.

Spotlight on Social Work



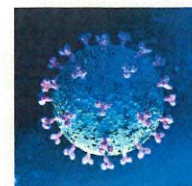
The theme for the March Mighty Nineties meeting reflected on Wisdom. It was a charming yet challenging conversation, filled with humor and insight. Here are some key reflections that emerged from the discussion:

- You can't take it with you ...so enjoy it.
- You must have empathy to be wise.
- Know yourself.
- Stay engaged.
- Patience is a cornerstone on wisdom. When you're in your nineties you wait and wait.
- Wisdom comes with experience.
- I wish I had my children in my nineties! I am so much wiser now and would do things differently.
- Wisdom is looking back and reflecting on the past. It is a perk of growing older.
- Wisdom is about listening and learning.
- Go with your instincts.

Vaccine Clinic with Bouvier Pharmacy Friday 5/2/25 in the Auditorium

A second dose of the 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for adults age 65 and over 6 months after the first.

Pre-registration is required, consent forms are completed online. Details will be emailed to Residents.



Contact the Clinic with any questions or if you need help signing up.



CWV is transitioning to a new version of MatrixCare, our Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system. New face sheets with separate medication lists will be distributed to all Independent Residents in late April or early May.