

# Elder Abuse

**E**lder abuse refers to the mistreatment of an older adult that threatens his or her health or safety. Although the abuse may be caused by a person who is in a position of trust, such as a family member or paid assistant, it also may be self-inflicted. In cases of **self-neglect**, an older person is unable to provide for his or her own needs (including hygiene, food, and housing) because of emotional, cognitive, or physical impairments. Elder abuse may result in depression, broken bones, sores, bruises, and death. Because persons experiencing elder abuse are often unable to seek help, friends, family, neighbors, or physicians may be in the best position to recognize and respond to an abusive situation. This Patient Page is based on one originally published in the August 5, 2009, issue of *JAMA*. The August 3, 2010, issue of *JAMA* is a theme issue on violence and human rights that includes an article discussing elder abuse and self-neglect.

## TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

- Physical abuse, such as infliction of pain or injury
- Sexual abuse, including any nonconsensual sexual contact
- Emotional abuse, such as yelling or verbal threats
- Caregiver neglect—refusal or failure to fulfill caregiver obligations to meet basic needs, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care
- Self-neglect
- Financial exploitation, such as unauthorized or improper use of a person's funds

## RISK FACTORS FOR ELDER ABUSE

An older person who:

- Has memory problems (such as dementia)
- Has physical disabilities
- Has depression, loneliness, or lack of social support
- Abuses alcohol or other substances
- Is verbally or physically combative with the caregiver

A caregiver who:

- Feels overwhelmed or resentful
- Has a history of substance abuse or history of abusing others
- Is dependent on the older person for housing, finances, or other needs

## RECOGNITION AND ACTIONS TO TAKE IF YOU SUSPECT ELDER ABUSE

- Intervene if you suspect elder abuse—in the United States, call the elder care help line at 1-800-677-1116.
- Listen to elders and their caregivers. Be alert for warning signs such as withdrawal from usual activities, unexplained bruises, or caregiver anger.
- If you are worried that you might become an abusive caregiver, get help from professionals and local support groups. Talk to your doctor. Accept help from family and friends.
- Seek counseling or other support if you are feeling stressed or depressed.

Sources: National Center on Elder Abuse, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/em-factsheet-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/em-factsheet-a.pdf)
- National Center on Elder Abuse  
[www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov)

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