

# Geriatric Anxiety:

Recognizing, Diagnosing,  
and Treatment



NCCDP In-service Toolkit



# Introduction



## Overview

- Anxiety disorders are common in older adults but often overlooked.
- Symptoms may be mistaken for aging or other medical conditions.
- Early recognition and proper treatment improve quality of life.

# Understanding Anxiety in Older Adults



## What is Anxiety?

- Persistent worry, fear, or unease that interferes with daily life.
- Can manifest physically, emotionally, and behaviorally.

## Prevalence in Older Adults

- Approximately 10-20% of older adults experience significant anxiety.
- Higher rates in those with chronic illnesses, cognitive decline, or social isolation.

# Recognizing Symptoms



## Common Signs of Anxiety

### Physical Symptoms

- Rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, sweating.
- Muscle tension, fatigue, gastrointestinal issues.

### Emotional Symptoms

- Excessive worry, fear, or restlessness.
- Irritability, difficulty concentrating.

### Behavioral Symptoms

- Avoidance of activities or social situations.
- Compulsive behaviors or over-reliance on others.

# Diagnosing Geriatric Anxiety



## Challenges in Diagnosis

- Overlap with medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, thyroid disorders).
- Stigma or reluctance to report emotional distress.
- Coexisting cognitive decline or depression.

## Diagnostic Tools

- Clinical interviews with focus on symptom history.
- Standardized scales (e.g., Geriatric Anxiety Scale, GAD-7).
- Collaboration with family or caregivers for observation reports.

# Treatment Options



## Therapeutic Approaches

### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- Addresses negative thought patterns and behaviors.
- Proven effective for older adults with anxiety.

### Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

- Encourages relaxation and present-moment awareness.
- Reduces physical and emotional symptoms of anxiety.

### Pharmacological Treatments

- SSRIs and SNRIs: First-line medications.
- Benzodiazepines: Used cautiously due to risk of dependence and side effects.
- Beta-Blockers: For physical symptoms like rapid heartbeat.

# Practical Strategies for Caregivers



## Supporting Older Adults with Anxiety

### 1. Communication

- Use a calm, reassuring tone.
- Validate their feelings without dismissing concerns.

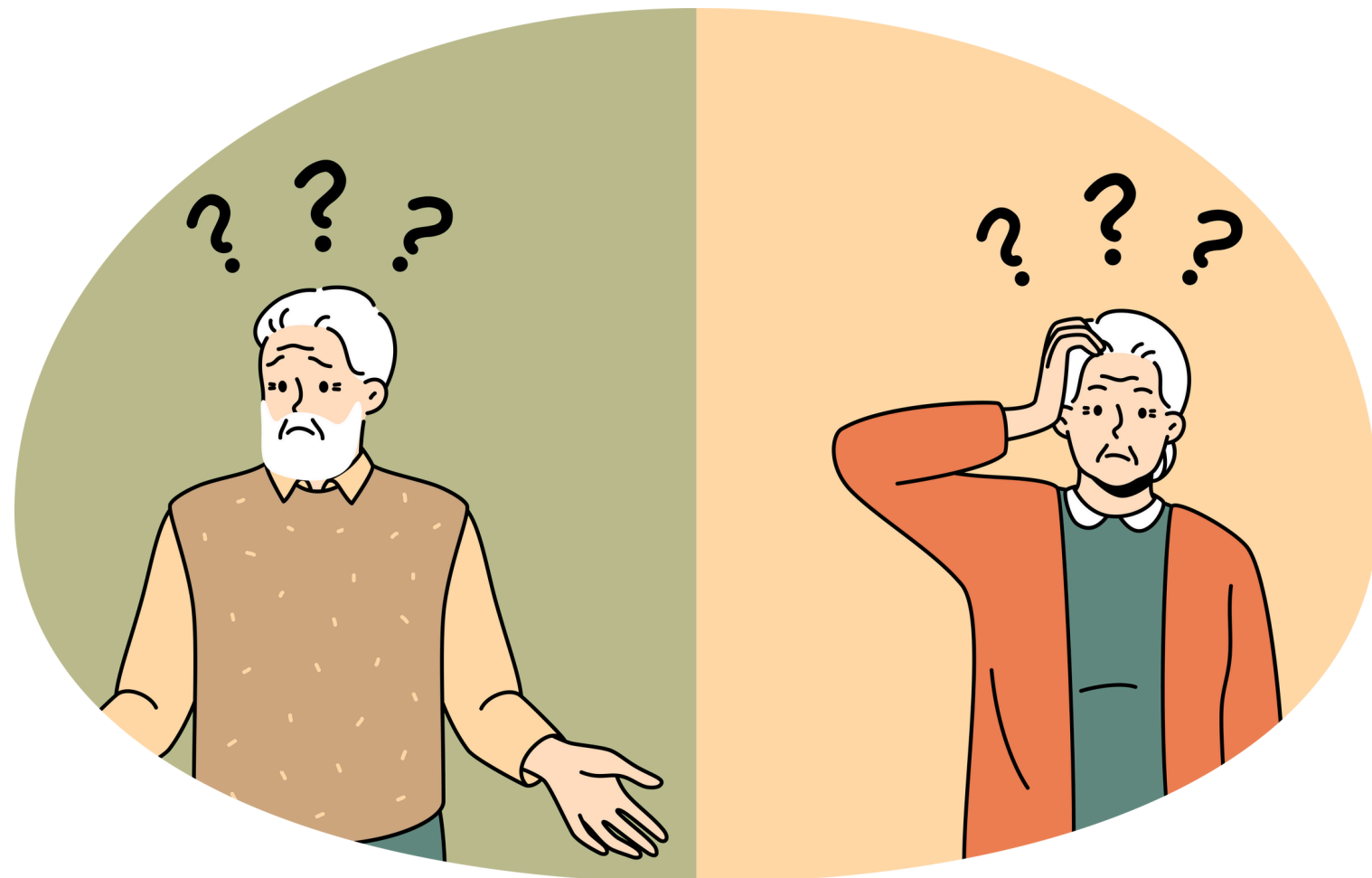
### 2. Environment

- Create a structured, predictable daily routine.
- Minimize environmental stressors (e.g., loud noises, clutter).

### 3. Encouraging Coping Skills

- Promote regular exercise, relaxation techniques, and hobbies.
- Suggest breathing exercises or progressive muscle relaxation.

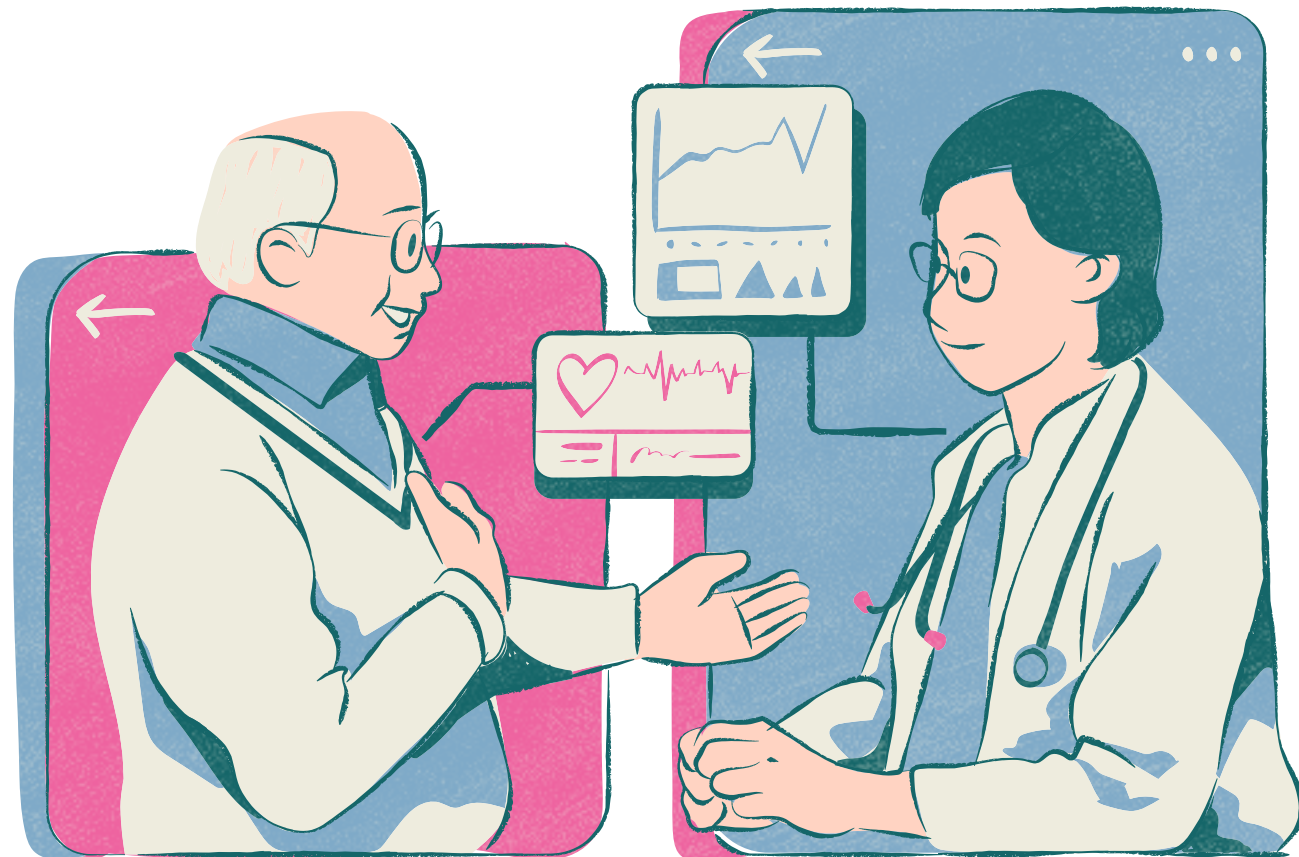
# Managing Acute Anxiety Episodes



## Caregiver Steps

- Stay calm and supportive.
- Use grounding techniques (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 sensory exercise).
- Encourage slow, deep breaths to reduce panic.
- Offer a quiet, comfortable space to decompress.

# Preventative Measures



## Reducing Anxiety Risk

- Encourage social engagement to combat isolation.
- Promote physical health with proper diet, hydration, and sleep.
- Help manage chronic illnesses to reduce health-related worries.
- Foster a sense of purpose through meaningful activities.

# Resources for Caregivers



## Where to Seek Help

- **National Institute on Aging:**  
[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)
- **Anxiety and Depression Association of America:** [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)
- **Geriatric Mental Health Foundation:**  
[www.gmhfonline.org](http://www.gmhfonline.org)
- Local support groups and community programs.

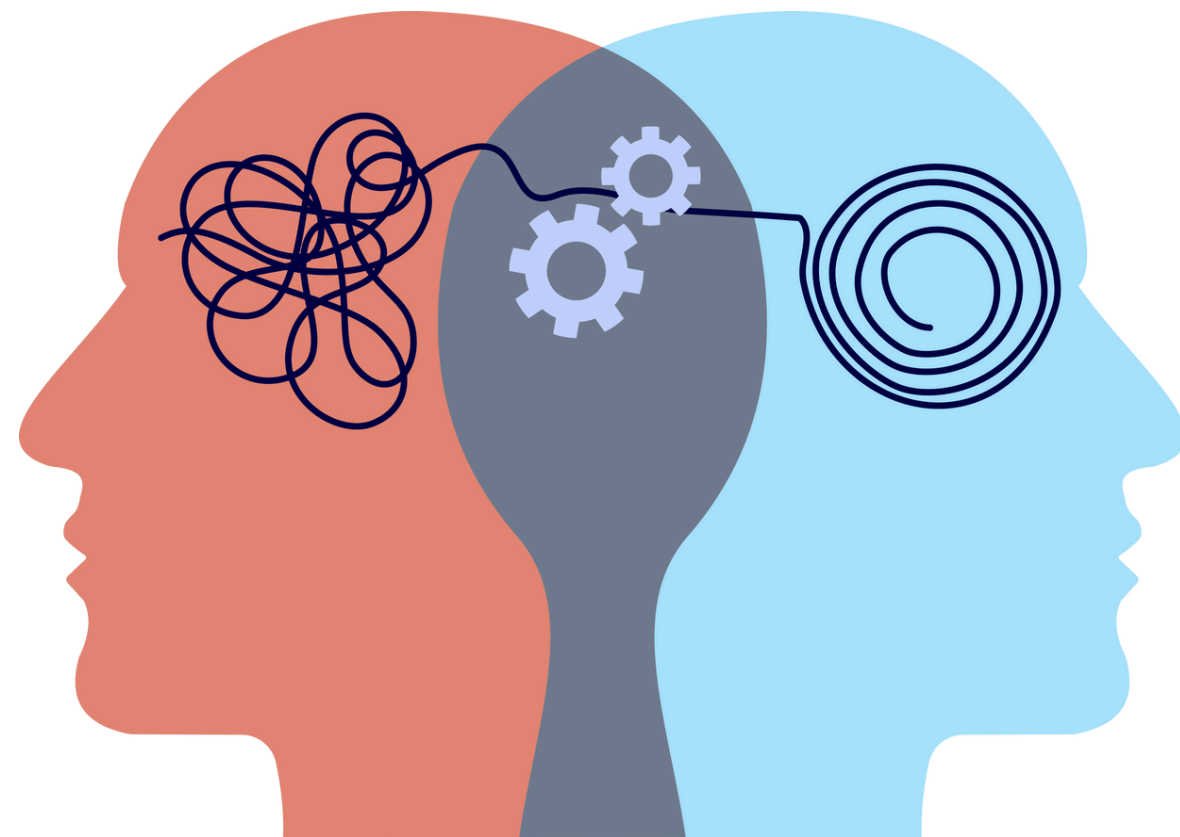
# Conclusion



## Key Takeaways

- Anxiety in older adults is common and treatable.
- Recognizing symptoms and seeking timely treatment is crucial.
- Caregivers play a vital role in supporting emotional well-being.

# Certifications & Additional Information



## **National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners (NCCDP)**

[www.nccdp.org](http://www.nccdp.org)

- ADDC Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Care curriculum
- CDP Certified Dementia Practitioner
- CADDCT Certified Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Care Trainer
- CDCM Certified Dementia Care Manager
- CDSGF Certified Dementia Support Group Facilitator
- CFRDT Certified First Responder Dementia Trainer

## **International Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners (ICCDP)**

[www.iccdp.net](http://www.iccdp.net)

- CMDCP Certified Montessori Dementia Care Professional
- CDP Certified Dementia Practitioner