



Start the Conversation: *Information About Retirement & Aging*

Retirement can be an exciting time of life. It allows you to spend more time with family and friends, explore old or new hobbies, volunteer for causes you care about, or focus on your health and well-being. In general, later life can offer meaning and a sense of fulfillment.

Like retirement, aging can bring many positive changes and opportunities, such as close connections with family and wisdom that comes from life experience.

Most of the time, retirement and aging bring a sense of clarity and new purpose, but sometimes they can require a period of adjustment or give rise to new challenges. Key areas of your life may be different as you get older and transition to life after work.

While retirement is an exciting phase for many people, certain issues can be challenging, including:

- ▶ Losing touch with co-workers and friends
- ▶ Feeling like your days lack focus without the routine of work
- ▶ Having more downtime to recall troubling events from your past, including combat and other military experiences
- ▶ Feeling upset when hearing about current events or news reports that may bring back memories of negative events during military service

Approximately 65% of all Veterans who die by suicide are age 50 or older.

— Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Age-related changes may cause concern for some individuals. Such changes may include:

- ▶ Becoming tired more quickly, feeling weaker, or needing to rest more frequently
- ▶ Feeling unhappy about your body's physical changes
- ▶ Noticing changes in your ability to hear or see as well as you did when you were younger
- ▶ Having a slower sexual response
- ▶ Worrying about financial issues

While gradual physical changes are a normal part of aging, excessive worry, fatigue, and unhappiness are not. They indicate that an older Veteran may need help.

If you are having a tough time adjusting to retirement or coping with the effects of aging, you may want to reach out for support. Consider connecting with:

- ▶ Your family doctor, who may know you well and be able to offer support, guidance, and appropriate referrals, including to a doctor who has experience treating Veterans if yours does not
- ▶ A mental health professional, such as a counselor or therapist
- ▶ Your local VA Medical Center or Vet Center: The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs specializes in the care and treatment of Veterans
- ▶ A spiritual or faith-based adviser

To make the most of retirement and aging, it may help to:

- ▶ Ask others for support
- ▶ Talk to other Veterans or friends and family with experiences similar to yours
- ▶ Enjoy a healthy lifestyle — combine an exercise routine with a healthy diet
- ▶ Quit smoking
- ▶ Refrain from excessive drug and alcohol use

WHEN CHALLENGES WITH RETIREMENT AND AGING REACH A CRISIS POINT

Some of the challenges that may come with aging and retirement can be difficult or stressful and can put a strain on your relationships. You might feel down on yourself or find it harder to enjoy things as much as usual. You may be dealing with chronic pain or medical conditions, or facing the illness or death of a loved one.

Learn to recognize these warning signs of a mental health crisis. If you notice any of the following, get help immediately or encourage your Veteran to do so:

- ▶ Engaging in self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse or reckless use of weapons
- ▶ Thinking about hurting or killing oneself
- ▶ Looking for ways or having a set plan in place to kill oneself
- ▶ Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- ▶ Saying final goodbyes to friends and family
- ▶ Putting personal affairs in order or giving away possessions

It's important that you talk to someone right away if you have thoughts of harming yourself, death, or suicide. You can always contact the **Veterans Crisis Line** by calling **1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1**, using the online chat, or **texting to 838255**. These services provide free, **confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.**

For additional information and resources to help a Veteran you're concerned about, visit *Start the Conversation: New Tools for Veteran Suicide Prevention* at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation