

Tips for Staying Connected during Loneliness and Social Isolation

Everyone needs social interactions to survive and thrive. But as people age, they often find themselves spending more time alone. Being alone may leave older adults more vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation, which can affect their health and well-being. Loneliness and social isolation are associated with higher risks for health problems such as heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline.

If you are in poor health, you may be more likely to be socially isolated or lonely. If you are socially isolated or feeling lonely, it can put your physical and mental health at risk.

What is the Difference Between Loneliness and Social Isolation?

The number of older people is growing rapidly, and many are socially isolated and regularly feel lonely. The coronavirus outbreak in 2020 brought even more challenges due to health considerations and the need to practice physical distancing.

Loneliness and social isolation are different, but related. Loneliness is the distressing feeling of being alone or separated. Social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly. You can live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated, and you can feel lonely while being with other people.

Older people are at higher risk for social isolation and loneliness due to changes in health and social interactions that can come with growing older, hearing, vision, and memory loss, disability, trouble getting around, and/or the loss of family and friends.

Staying Connected During pandemic situations

With the pandemic, maintaining safe distancing precautions has been challenging for everyone — even people who are otherwise well-connected with large supportive social networks.

Public health guidelines to keep physical distance from others have slowed the spread of Covid, but they have also made it harder for people to see family and friends. Older people are at greater risk of pandemic, but it is also critically important for them to maintain active social connections. Reach out by phone, video, text, email, social media, etc to help everyone stay connected during this challenging time.

How Can Feeling Lonely or Being Isolated Affect Older People's Health?

Older people who are socially isolated or lonely are more likely to be admitted to the hospital or to a nursing home. Social isolation and loneliness also are associated with higher risks for:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease

- Obesity
- Weakened immune function
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Cognitive decline
- Dementia, including Alzheimer's disease

Older people who are lonely or socially isolated may get too little exercise, drink too much alcohol, smoke, and often don't sleep well, which can further increase the risk of serious health conditions.

Older people who are lonely experience emotional pain. Losing a sense of connection and community can change the way a person sees the world. Someone experiencing chronic loneliness may feel threatened and mistrustful of others.

Emotional pain can activate the same stress responses in the body as physical pain. When this goes on for a long time, it can lead to chronic inflammation (over-active or prolonged release of factors that can damage tissues) and reduced immunity (ability to fight off disease). This raises your risk of chronic diseases and can leave a person more vulnerable to some infectious diseases.

Social isolation and loneliness may also be bad for brain health. Loneliness and social isolation have been linked to poorer cognitive function and higher risk for dementia, including and especially for Alzheimer's disease. Also, little social activity and being alone most of the time may contribute to a decline in the ability to perform everyday tasks such as walking, paying bills, taking medicine, and cooking, etc.

In case you Need Help

You may contact Agewell Helplines for older persons at +911129836486 / 29840484 Or write to agewellfoundation@gmail.com
