

Social Isolation and Loneliness: Facts for Older Adults

Emotional pain can activate the same stress responses in the body as physical pain raising the risk and vulnerability to infectious and chronic diseases.

Facts:

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.

Those who find themselves unexpectedly isolated due to the illness of a loved one, loss of mobility, worsening vision or hearing problems, disability, or lack of mobility or access to transportation, are at particular risk of loneliness and social isolation. The world-wide pandemic has caused additional separation from friends or family.

You also may be at greater risk if you:

- Live alone
- Are a caregiver
- Struggle with money
- Can't leave your home
- Have a language barrier
- Have limited social support
- Have hearing loss or impairment
- Had a major life change, such as the death of a spouse or partner, or retirement
- Have psychological or cognitive challenges, or depression
- Live in a rural or unaccessible neighborhood
- Experience age, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity discrimination
- Are not meaningfully engaged in activities



How Can I Tell if I Have a Problem?

People who are lonely or socially isolated may get too little exercise, drink too much alcohol, smoke, and often don't sleep well, increasing the risk of serious health conditions.

People who are lonely can feel emotional pain. Losing a sense of connection and community can change the way a person sees the world. Loneliness can make a person feel threatened and mistrustful of others.

Emotional pain can cause the same stress responses in the body as physical pain. When this goes on for a long time, it can lessen the ability to fight off disease.

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



What can I do if I feel Isolated or Lonely?

If you are feeling isolated or lonely a lot of the time, you may want to tell your doctor or health professional. Talking about your health with your doctor means sharing information about how you feel physically, emotionally, and mentally. Describing your symptoms can help your doctor identify the problem.

Make sure to bring up your concerns. For example, let your doctor know about any major changes or stresses in your life, such as a divorce or the death of a loved one. A doctor who knows about your losses and understands how you are feeling can make helpful suggestions.

Be open and honest with your doctor about your health habits and what's happening in your life. It will help them to understand your medical conditions and emotional health more fully and recommend the best treatment options for you.

How Can You Get and Stay Connected with Friends, Family, and Community?

It's important to stay active and connect with others. People who engage in meaningful, productive activities they enjoy with others feel a sense of purpose and tend to live longer. Schedule time each day to stay in touch with family, friends, and neighbors in person, by email, social media, voice call, or text.

Connect with others and build social relationships by getting involved in community activities, taking advantage of opportunities for physical activities, enrolling in lifelong learning classes, and volunteering.

For More Information

Montgomery County Senior Hot Line

Call: 240-777-3000

Montgomery County Senior Web Site

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior>

Montgomery County Thrive at Home

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/thrive

Resources and Websites:

Montgomery County Senior Centers

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/facilities/SeniorCenters/index.html

Engage@HOME is a new YouTube Channel from Montgomery County's Caregiver Support program.

EveryMind Friendly Visitor Program

Amy Fier: afier@Every-Mind.org 301-424-0656

JCA Heyman Interages® Center

Intergenerational programs have brought children and older adults together for 30 years.

www.accessjca.org/interages

Senior Planet Montgomery Free Classes for Older Adults. www.seniorplanet.org/locations/montgomery-county

Montgomery County Villages foster social connections using a neighbor helping neighbor model. www.montgomerycountymd.gov/village

Montgomery County 50+ Volunteer Network Connecting 50+ population seeking purposeful volunteer opportunities.

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/volunteercenter/volunteers/50Plus.html

Montgomery County Libraries for Seniors

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/library/for-you/seniors.html

Montgomery College Lifelong Learning

www.montgomerycollege.edu/lifelonglearning

African American Health Program

www.aahpmontgomerycounty.org/seniors-corner

American Muslim Senior Society (AMSS)

www.amssmd.org/about-us

Asian American Health Initiative Photonovels

www.aahiinfo.org/aahi-resources

Chinese American Senior Services Association (CASSA)

www.cassaseniors.org

Latino Health Initiative of Montgomery County

www.lhiinfo.org/programs-projects

50+ in Montgomery County shares news and information of interest to senior residents.

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/CCM/seniorstoday.html

Much of this content is provided by the National Institute on Aging at NIH: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/loneliness-and-social-isolation-tips-staying-connected>

