

Loneliness in Late Adulthood



What is Loneliness?

While common definitions of loneliness describe it as a state of solitude or being alone, loneliness is actually a state of mind. Loneliness is defined by researchers as defined as feeling lonely more than once a week.

Loneliness causes people to feel empty, alone, and unwanted. People who are lonely often crave human contact, but their state of mind makes it more difficult to form connections with other people.

Loneliness, according to many experts, is not necessarily about being alone. Instead, if you feel alone and isolated, then that is how loneliness plays into your state of mind. For example, a college freshman might feel lonely despite being surrounded by roommates and other peers. A soldier beginning his military career might feel lonely after being deployed to a foreign country, despite being constantly surrounded by other troop members.

Having a community of people we connect with is an important aspect of our development.

When we lack social connection, then, the effects may be both physical and emotional. To prevent these potentially harmful effects, we must find ways to develop deeper connections.

The reality is that younger adults and midlife life adults all can – and do – face loneliness as they go through significant life changing situations. For some adults one event can create extreme loneliness, whereas for others it's the accumulation of so many problems



or perceived failures that brings on loneliness. Adulthood is not easy, and it is often a lonely experience...regardless of whether you live alone or among an expanding family. It's the time you might be facing your greatest relationship break-ups, or the greatest financial problems. As an adult you might be experiencing the greatest fear over your own and the mortality of others, as you see so many people around you critically ill, and dying....some of the hardest deaths being your parents and your own children. Your significance in the world changes...your best friends, and good colleagues, come and go... and you have perpetual change, beyond your ability to cope at times.

Signs/Symptoms of Loneliness

Being lonely for short periods is also not necessarily unhealthy. What we are considering is the type of loneliness which is prolonged and might be damaging to an individual's health and wellbeing. Some people talk about their loneliness; other's don't; Some might not recognise that they are actually suffering from loneliness.

When people are already lonely, having people around you that you aren't able to connect with on a deeper level, might even make your loneliness worse.

This manifests behaviour such as:

- Avoiding** people whose lives you see as more successful than yours.
- Withdrawing from sharing with your family** as their pressures on you to have children, to buy a house, to get promotion become too much.
- Making little space** to look after you own needs, putting everyone else first.
- Dwelling on the negative in life**, and finding it hard to see the good.

-Hiding your feelings from your children and spouse... you don't want them to know about the serious problem you have got yourself into.

-Giving up, and just withdrawing from anything that used to interest you.

-Inability to connect with others on a deeper, more intimate level. Maybe you have friends and family in your life, but engagement with them is at a very surface level. Your interaction doesn't feel connected in a way that is fulfilling and this disconnection seems never ending.

-No close or "best" friends. You have friends, but they are casual friends or acquaintances and you feel you can find no one who truly "gets" you.

-Overwhelming feeling of isolation regardless of where you are and who's around. You can be at a party surrounded by dozens of people and, yet, you feel isolated, separate, and disengaged. At work, you may feel alienated and alone. Same on a bus, train, or walking down a busy street. It's as if you're in your own unbreakable bubble.

-Negative feelings of self-doubt and self-worth. Does it feel like you are always less than enough? These feelings--long-term--are another possible symptom of chronic loneliness. When you try to connect or reach out, it's not reciprocated, and you're not seen or heard.

-Exhaustion and burn out when trying to engage socially. If you're dealing with chronic loneliness, trying to engage and be social with others can leave you feeling exhausted. Continued feelings of being drained can lead to other issues like sleep problems, a weakened immune system, poor diet, and more.



The causes of Loneliness and Self-Isolation

Several reasons or factors can contribute to loneliness and isolation, including:

- death of spouse;**
- children moving away;**
- a change in living environment;**
- loss of network of friends;**
- fear of becoming a burden;**
- fear of going out and falling;**
- difficulty communicating (language or hearing problems);**
- illness (ex: cancer, Alzheimer's disease)**



Health Risks associated with Loneliness

Loneliness has a wide range of negative effects on both physical and mental health , including:

- 1-Cardiovascular disease and stroke
- 2-Increased stress levels
- 3-Decreased memory and learning
- 4-Antisocial behavior
- 5-Poor decision-making
- 6-Alcoholism and drug abuse
- 7-The progression of Alzheimer's disease
- 8-Altered brain function
- 9-Depression and suicide

If you are having suicidal thoughts, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

at 1-800-273-8255 for support and assistance from a trained counselor. If you or a loved one are in immediate danger, call 911.

These are not the only areas in which loneliness takes its toll.

Lonely adults get less exercise than those who are not lonely. Their diet is higher in fat, their sleep is less efficient, and they report more daytime fatigue. Loneliness also disrupts the regulation of cellular processes deep within the body, predisposing us to premature aging.



Conquering Loneliness and Isolation requires Teamwork

- 1-**Visit the person as often as you can. If you have a busy schedule, make shorter visits more often.
- 2-**Call the person regularly and encourage him or her to phone you. Make sure that the person can easily reach you. Show interest in the topics that are on his or her mind: day-to-day life, health, hobbies and problems.
- 3-**Also talk about subjects that interest you, even if you get the feeling that the person doesn't feel involved. Who knows, you might benefit from his or her advice, and it will also give you the opportunity to make the person feel that he or she matters.
- 4-**Encourage the person to stay active. Go for a walk together or tag along when she or he runs errands.
- 5-**When you visit, bring your children or those of family members. Senior citizens often enjoy the company of young children, who represent a great source of joy and entertainment. You can also bring a pet, if you have one, and if the elderly person enjoys

that. Animal therapy is a proven method to combat loneliness and isolation.

6-Suggest adopting a pet. Offer your help in caring for the pet or for vet appointments. Offer the person your help for personal care or housework. Styling someone's hair or helping her or him straighten or clean up the house can give you the opportunity to chat and to build a better relationship.

7-Invite the person for lunch or dinner at your house, ideally with the family. Lively meals are also great opportunities to talk and to enjoy the good things in life.

8-Encourage the person to join or sign up for various activities: bridge, bingo, arts and crafts, outings with a seniors' club, dancing, etc. If necessary, drive him or her; you and the other members of your family can even take turns playing chauffeur.

Combating loneliness means preventing exclusion, poverty, loss of autonomy, and psychological or emotional distress. Everyone must do his or her part to contribute to the well-being of our senior citizens and implement measures allowing them to conquer loneliness and isolation. Our elderly members are a national and familial treasure, so it is our duty to take care of them. As the Beatles famously sang: "All the lonely people, where do they all belong?"

Thank You....