



News For Older Americans

Overcoming Isolation And Loneliness

(NAPS)—If you've ever felt lonely, you're not alone. Researchers at the University of Chicago found that nearly half of older adults in America experience some degree of loneliness.

The University of Chicago study is part of Connect2Affect, a collaborative effort spearheaded by AARP Foundation to learn more about isolation and loneliness in older adults and to work toward practical solutions to reconnect older adults to their communities.

One thing the study highlighted that may seem surprising to many is that loneliness and isolation are not the same.

Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness or subjective isolation denotes how people perceive their experience and whether they feel isolated.

Objective isolation involves quantifiable measurements, such as the size of the person's social network (and the frequency of engagement with it), availability of transportation, and ability to access resources and information.

The Problem

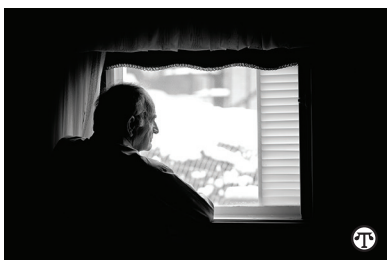
Together, loneliness and isolation create a growing health epidemic. The health risks of prolonged isolation—in its broadest sense, including both objective isolation and loneliness—are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. More than 8 million adults age 50 and older are affected by it.

Why Isolation Happens

Often, there are multiple causes, including poor physical and mental health, poorly designed communities, and major life events such as loss and retirement.

Socioeconomic status stands out as a differentiator between nonlonely and lonely individuals. Lonely older adults are significantly more likely to have an annual household income of less than \$25,000 and assets less than \$10,000, and are more likely overall to be in the lowest income group.

Marital status is another strong indicator of loneliness. Both married and unmarried older adults can be lonely—but the lonely are less likely to be married and more likely to be divorced, separated or widowed. Fourteen percent of married older adults and 30 percent of unmarried older adults fall into the lonely group. While married women are at a higher risk of loneliness than married men, unmarried women are at a lower risk of loneliness than unmarried men. In both cases, those with more support and less



Research suggests it's a healthy idea for older Americans to avoid isolation.

strain in their marital relationship are at lower risk of loneliness.

Some Answers

Fortunately, isolation can be overcome. Here are 12 ideas to try:

- Nurture and strengthen existing relationships. Ask people over for coffee, or invite them to join you for a trip to a museum or a movie.
- Schedule a time each day to call a friend or visit someone.
- Meet your neighbors—young or old.
- Use social media such as Facebook to stay in touch with long-distance friends, or write an old-fashioned letter.
- Stay physically active and include group exercise as a fun way to socialize while staying healthy.
- Take a class to learn something new and expand your circle of friends.
- Revisit an old hobby and connect with others who share your interests.
- Volunteer to deepen your sense of purpose and help others.
- Visit a senior or community center to find a wide range of activities and opportunities to meet people.
- Check out faith-based organizations. Many offer outreach to help isolated community members.
- Don't let being a nondriver keep you from staying active. Find out about your transportation options. Many communities have free or low-cost services, and ride-hailing apps are an affordable option for many.
- Get involved in a cause.

Learn More

For further advice about isolation, check out the Connect2Affect website at <http://connect2affect.org/>. The website includes a searchable directory of local resources to help people connect with their communities and a fast, easy self-assessment test to identify isolation risk. For information about AARP Foundation, visit www.aarpfoundation.org.