



LONELINESS, SOCIAL ISOLATION, & HEALTHY AGING

**The Maine Initiative for Neurologic Aging & Health (MAINAH)
Northern Light Acadia Hospital**

Webinar on Health Brain Aging

Wednesday, October 5, 2023

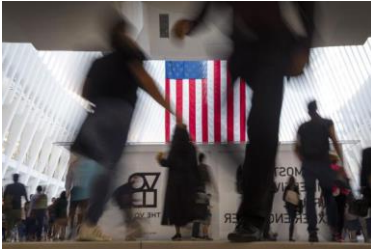
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Recent News Headlines Tell the Story



**HOW SOCIAL ISOLATION, LONELINESS CAN
SHORTEN LIFE**

THE HARVARD GAZETTE| - OCT 3, 2023

Loneliness poses health risks as deadly as smoking, surgeon general says *The Associated Press* - May 2, 2023

How Loneliness is Damaging Your Health

The New York Times – April 20, 2022

**SOCIAL ISOLATION, LONELINESS LINKED TO INCREASED RISK OF ALL-CAUSE
MORTALITY** *MEDICAL NEWS TODAY*– JUNE 27, 2023

**Social isolation, loneliness can damage heart
and brain health, report says** *American Heart Association News* August 4, 2022

HOW THE AMERICAN DREAM CONVINCES PEOPLE LONELINESS IS NORMAL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS MAY 16, 2023

We increasingly recognize there is a “biology” of loneliness and involuntary social isolation

- Human beings are social creatures
- Our connection to others enables us to survive and thrive
- Yet, as we age, many of us are alone more often than when we were younger



Being socially isolated carries much greater physical health risks but loneliness has a larger impact on mental-health-related conditions.

The Surgeon General Advisory: An Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation

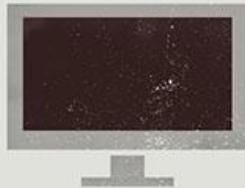


The Culprits

- **Ethic and culture of individualism**
- **Technology/Social media**
 - **A mobile society**
 - **Living alone**
 - **Remote work**
 - **The pandemic**

“WHY DO I FEEL ISOLATED?”

Survey respondents reveal what's keeping them from staying connected



29%

No access to Internet at home



17%

No longer drive or don't have a car



48%

Family and friends too far away



10%

No public transportation



13%

Caregiver responsibilities



12%

Physical limitations



42%

Family and friends too busy

Social isolation and loneliness are different

Social isolation

- Lacking social contacts and regular interactions with other people
- It can occur over long or short periods of time and is a distinctly physical state
- Characterized by staying home most or all of the time, refusing interpersonal interaction, and avoiding social situations

Loneliness

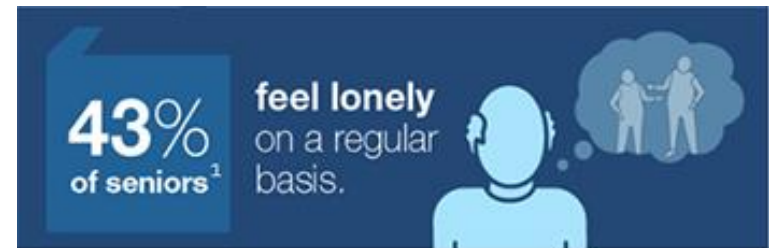
- Distressing feeling of being alone or separated
- Feeling a sad sense of solitude or emptiness in the world
- Loneliness is an emotional state
- Loneliness is often triggered by some type of a loss



- ❖ **You can live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated, and you can feel lonely while being with other people**
- ❖ **Isolation may lead to loneliness, and in some cases, loneliness may lead to isolation**

Isolation and Loneliness Are on the Rise

- Americans more socially isolated than ever before especially in rural and underserved urban areas
- Prevalence was as high as 43% among community dwelling older adults before the pandemic
- High risk for caregivers of older adults as well
- COVID-19 served to escalate isolation and loneliness to unprecedented levels. It rose to 75% and higher at that time
- Advances in communications and technology has not served to slow the rise in the loneliness and isolation epidemic



The Workplace Does Not Protect Us From Feeling Lonely

- Loneliness hurts businesses as well –



ABSENTEEISM



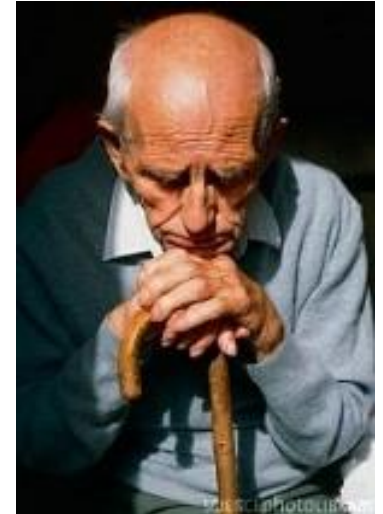
PRODUCTIVITY

“IT IS LONELY AT THE TOP”

At Greatest Risk of Isolation

Older adults:

- With physical and functional impairment
- Living alone
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- 80 years and older
- Living on low income
- Lacking instrumental support (access to transportation, the internet, telephone, etc.)
- With poor mental health
- Facing critical life transitions
- **With a fragile social network**



Social Isolation and its Associated Risks

- **Negatively impacts health, well-being, and quality of life, including increased risk of:**

- ✓ Disabilities
- ✓ Lower self-reported health/well-being
- ✓ Mortality and morbidity
- ✓ Dementias
- ✓ Hospitalizations
- ✓ Suicide
- ✓ Falls
- ✓ Disrupted sleep patterns
- Not surviving natural disasters
- Poor health practices
- Infrequent visits to health care providers
- Psychological distress
- Abuse/neglect/exploitation
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Common cold

Staying Connected is Good Medicine

- Decreases your risk of heart disease by 29%
- Decreases the risk of stroke by 32%
- Decreases the risk of developing dementia by 50%
- Decreases the risk of premature death by more than 60%
- Significantly reduces the risk of depression

Connections not only significantly increases individual health but also community health as measured by our sense of safety, resilience when natural disasters strike, feelings of prosperity, and civic engagement

What Can We All Do to Maximize Our Health?

- Get medical and psychiatric help if needed
- Engaged in good health behaviors
- See your health care professional regularly
- Stay active and engaged
- Employ technology that connects you to others
- **Maximize human contact!**



For the Policy Advocates Among Us, the Surgeon General Endorses....

- Designing communities that promote connection
- Enacting pro-connection public policies (e.g., access to transportation, paid family leave, etc.)
- Mobilizing the health care sector
- Using digital technology thoughtfully
- Creating a culture of connection



Don't Buy Into the American Dream of Individualism – Today's Takeaways

- Loneliness is an American epidemic and can be deadly
- Be aware of the tell-tale stressors
- Solitude and isolation do not equate with loneliness
- Understand your desired level of connection
- Stay active, engaged and connected physically, mentally, and socially



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