



Combatting Loneliness as We & Our Loved Ones Age

Loneliness can affect the mental and physical health of all of us. For those aged 65 and older, loneliness can be particularly perilous: research shows that 24% of U.S. adults over 65 are socially isolated, putting them at greater risk for a host of health issues.

Loneliness and social isolation have been linked to higher rates of heart disease, stroke, cognitive decline, depression and anxiety. Studies have shown that chronic loneliness can be as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and significantly elevates the risk of developing comorbidities such as diabetes and hypertension.

Mentally, social isolation often exacerbates the natural decline in cognitive function as people age. Aging adults who feel disconnected from society are more prone to depression, anxiety and even suicidal thoughts. For those who already struggle with mental health concerns, such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease, loneliness can accelerate their progression.

Social Isolation in Older Populations

As we get older, the risk of social isolation increases. This is especially true when transitioning into retirement — losing daily social interactions, structure and a sense of purpose that come with a job can be a major emotional blow. Many retirees find themselves feeling aimless, which contributes to feelings of loneliness. Additionally, as aging adults face the death of close friends and loved ones, they lose critical support systems. These losses compound over time, creating a vacuum of companionship and deepening feelings of loneliness.

Physical limitations also play a role in isolation. Mobility issues, chronic illness or loss of physical independence can make it more difficult for seniors to engage with their communities. One in five Americans 65 and older don't drive, with 40% unable to complete activities for themselves because they don't have transportation. These limitations often lead to decreased social participation and greater isolation.

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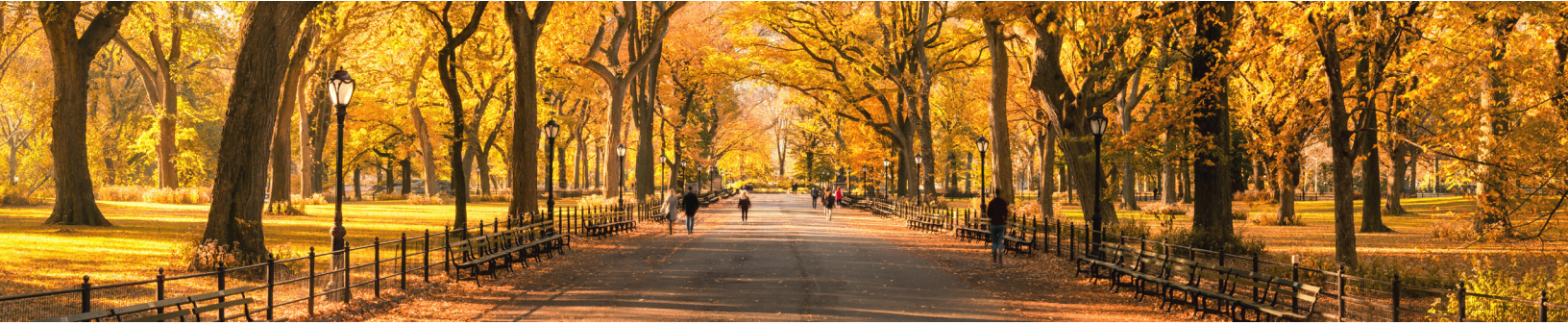


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U.S. Surgeon General

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Caregivers Can Help Loved Ones Find Community

Caregivers play an essential role in helping loved ones combat loneliness. The first step is acknowledging the importance of social connection and actively seeking out opportunities to build or maintain them. Here are ways to find community for loved ones:

Senior Centers and Local Community Groups: Many towns have senior centers that offer a variety of activities tailored to older adults, including exercise classes, group outings and social events. Local churches, libraries or community centers may also host events or support groups for seniors.

Technology: With the rise of technology, it's easier than ever to help seniors stay connected. Set up video calls with family and friends, teach them how to use social media, or find online groups where they can engage in hobbies or interests they love.

Volunteering and Hobbies: Volunteering can offer a renewed sense of purpose and social engagement. These activities provide a fulfilling way for seniors to engage with their community.

Social Services or Home Care Providers: Sometimes professional help is needed. Caregivers can explore home care services or programs that provide companionship for seniors who are largely housebound. Many programs pair seniors with companions who visit regularly to provide conversation and assistance with daily tasks.

Supporting Mental Health for Aging Loved Ones

Caregivers are in a unique position to observe the mental well-being of their aging loved ones and should be proactive in addressing any signs of depression, anxiety or emotional distress. If you notice a change in mood, behavior or cognitive function, it's essential to act quickly. Speak with your loved one's primary care physician (PCP) and ask for a referral to a therapist or mental health professional who specializes in geriatric care. Many health care providers can offer guidance on mental health services, from individual counseling to support groups for seniors facing loneliness, loss or other emotional challenges. The sooner these concerns are addressed, the better the chances of preventing more serious mental health complications.

Whether it's through Lucet resources, community programs or simply being there for regular check-ins, caregivers' efforts are vital in combating loneliness and ensuring that loved ones thrive in their later years.

#CareForCaregivers #RespectOurElders

If you or someone you know is older and struggling mentally, or needs support while caring for an aging loved one, you can find more resources through the **National Council on Aging** at www.ncoa.org.

