

## Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults

Information for Caregivers



## Definition

**Loneliness** is the feeling of being alone or living alone, regardless of the amount of social contact.<sup>1</sup>

**Social isolation** is a lack of social connections. Social isolation can lead to loneliness in some people, while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated.<sup>1</sup>

## Health Risks of Loneliness and Social Isolation

Social isolation and loneliness may increase the risk of physical and mental conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and even death.<sup>2</sup>

## Who is at Risk of Loneliness and Isolation?

Older adults who find themselves unexpectedly alone due to:

- Death of a spouse or partner
- Separation from friends or family
- Retirement
- Loss of mobility or independence
- Getting ill and becoming dependent on others
- Having multiple chronic health problems
- Having no children or no contact with family
- Living with low income
- Changing family structure
- Being left behind by younger people migrating for work<sup>3</sup>

## How to Address Loneliness and Social Isolation in the Elderly


- Engaging in activities in a local or religious community
- Becoming a volunteer in some organization or working voluntarily
- Engaging in social activities with other seniors or colleagues
- Following an active lifestyle
- Taking up an old hobby or a new one to stay occupied and prevent negative thinking

## References:

1. Centre for disease control and Prevention. Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions. 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>
2. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663> external icon.
3. National Seniors Council (2014). Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors 2013–2014. Government of Canada, p.9. Retrieved July 15, 2015, from [http://www.seniorscouncil.gc.ca/eng/research\\_publications/social\\_isolation/page00.shtml](http://www.seniorscouncil.gc.ca/eng/research_publications/social_isolation/page00.shtml)

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