



Social Isolation and Loneliness

- What is social isolation?
- What is loneliness?
- How do social isolation and loneliness impact health?
- How we can improve social health?



Social Connections

- People develop networks with friends, family, colleagues, and community groups.
- Social connections improve health, well-being and longevity.
- People who participate in activities with others may live longer, be in a better mood, and feel more valued.
- Participating in social activities can increase the sense of well-being and may improve memory function, thinking and decision-making abilities.



Social Isolation and Loneliness

- Social isolation and loneliness are often used interchangeably but do not mean the same thing.
 - **Isolation** is the number of contacts to family, friends, neighbours and community.
 - **Loneliness** is an individual's personal, subjective sense of being alone or wanting more connection.
- Someone could have a lot of connections and still feel lonely; other people choose to have very few connections and do not feel lonely.

[Singer, 2018; National Institute on Aging, 2019](#)

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Social Isolation

- Social isolation can be because someone is living alone or far away from family and friends (physical isolation), or because they are not able to attend desired social events.
- Social exclusion is also a form of social isolation.
 - For example, when a person is not invited to participate in an event that they would have liked to attend or felt they should have been invited to and were not included.

[Goodman, Adams, & Swift, 2015](#)

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Loneliness

- Loneliness is a feeling of being disconnected from others and/or not belonging in a group.
- Feelings of loneliness can occur when the social relationships someone wants are not matched with what they actually have.
- Loneliness can happen as a result of a loss or death of a spouse/partner, a move resulting in separation from friends and family, retirement, decreased mobility or limited access to transportation.
- Older people who are unsatisfied in their relationship with their spouse often report being lonely.

[Goodman, Adams, & Swift, 2015, National Institute on Aging 2019; Anderson & Thayer, 2018](#)

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Campaign to End Loneliness

- [Let's Talk More!](#)



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Who Experiences Isolation and Loneliness?

- The following increases the likelihood of someone experiencing social isolation and loneliness:
 - they live alone
 - are over 80 years old
 - have compromised health status, including having multiple chronic health problems
 - have no children or contact with family
 - lack access to transportation
 - live with low income
 - have changing family structures such as younger people migrating for work and leaving seniors behind
 - they are experiencing a critical life transitions (e.g. retirement, death of spouse, losing driver's license)

[Singer, 2018; Government of Canada, 2014](#)

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Older Adults, Isolation and Loneliness

- An older adults is at even greater risk if they:
 - have physical or mental health issues, such as dementia
 - are low income
 - are caregivers
 - are Indigenous
 - are newcomers to Canada or immigrants
 - are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered

[Anderson & Thayer, 2018](#)

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The Impact of Isolation and Loneliness

- Isolation and loneliness increases the risk of:
 - negative health behaviours, such as drinking, smoking, being sedentary and not eating well
 - high blood pressure
 - heart disease
 - obesity
 - a weakened immune system
 - anxiety, depression and suicide
 - cognitive decline and dementia
 - death

[Retired Teachers of Ontario Foundation, n.d.](#); [National Institute on Aging, 2019](#)

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The Impact of Isolation and Loneliness

- Having weak social connections carries a health risk that is:
 - equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day
 - equivalent to being an alcoholic
 - more harmful than not exercising
 - twice as harmful as obesity

[Retired Teachers of Ontario Foundation, n.d.](#)

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Improving Social Health for Older Persons

- Family, friends, caregivers, and health care providers can help by:
 - stopping by to visit or calling regularly
 - using technology such as video chats to stay in touch
 - facilitating introductions to neighbours and community
 - encourage them to adopt a pet; help them get the pet to vet visits if needed
 - encourage physical activity; go for a walk together

[National Institute on Aging 2019; Government of Canada, 2014](#)

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Improving Social Health for Older Persons

- Family, friends, caregivers, and health care providers can help by:
 - offering to assist with transportation to and from appointments, errands or social events
 - planning social activities that include older people who are isolated
 - helping identify activities they enjoy and find meaning in such as hobbies and interests
 - including older adults in conversation during social events; being mindful of hearing needs

[National Institute on Aging 2019; Government of Canada, 2014](#)

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Reflection... Isolation and Loneliness

Do you feel lonely? What are some things you will do to decrease your loneliness?

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You Have Completed the Social Isolation and Loneliness eLearning Course!

For more information on this and other topics, please visit our [eFit Resources for Individuals & Caregivers on www.sagelink.ca](http://www.sagelink.ca).

We appreciate your feedback. Please contact info@sagelink.ca if you have suggestions, comments or have any questions.

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