

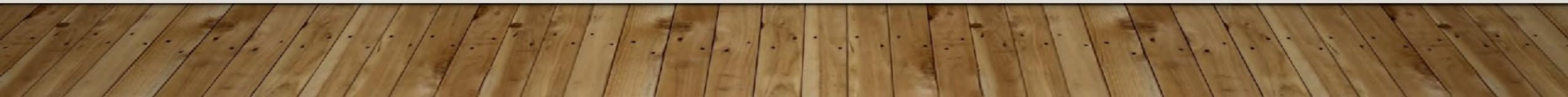
SOCIAL ISOLATION

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DID YOU KNOW....

- **Social isolation impacts approximately 24% of older adults in the United States, approximately 9 million people**
- **Individuals with less social connections have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune systems, more inflammation and higher levels of stress hormones**
- **Isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29% and stroke by 32%**
- **Socially isolated individuals had a 30% higher risk of dying in the next seven years, and this effect was largest in middle ages**
- **People report feeling lonelier, more depressed and less satisfied with life during the holiday season**

DID YOU KNOW?.....

- **43% of Americans report they often feel “isolated from others”**
 - **27% feel they don’t have people who truly understand them**
 - **47% do not have meaningful in-person social interactions (such as quality time with family) on a regular basis**
 - **26% of people 65 and older live alone**
 - **Men are more socially isolated than women**
 - **Loneliness is as important a risk factor for early death as obesity and smoking**
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WHAT IS ISOLATION?

- **Isolation is the experience of being separated from others. It may result from being physically separated from others, such as when a person lives in a remote area, isolation can also result from being emotionally removed from a community. The separation may be real or perceived**

WHAT IS SOCIAL ISOLATION?

- **Social isolation is the absence of social relationships. It is distinct from solitude, which is simply the state of being alone**
- **Social isolation can occur in solitude or in the vicinity of others**
- **Social isolation can be chosen or forced, healthy or unhealthy**
- **It describes an unwanted and often harmful experience**

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- **Avoid social interaction due to shame or depression**
- **Spend extended periods of time alone**
- **Experience social anxiety or fears of abandonment at the idea of social interaction**
- **Have only limited or superficial social contact**
- **Lack important social or professional relationships**
- **Develop severe distress and loneliness**

SOCIAL ISOLATION

- **True social isolation over years and decades can be a chronic condition affecting all aspects of a person's existence**
- **Social isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, fear of others, or negative self-esteem**
- **Lack of consistent human contact can also cause conflict with the peripheral friends the socially isolated person may occasionally talk to or cause problems with family members**

WHAT IS LONELINESS?

- **It is a subjective feeling of isolation, not belonging or lacking companionship**
- **It is the psychological embodiment of social isolation**
- **Loneliness is the distressing feeling associated with discrepancies between one's desired and actual social relationships**
- **One can feel lonely even if they live with a spouse or other family members**

LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

- **They are bad for your health**
- **Loneliness and social isolation are associated with high rates of depression, a weakened immune system, heart disease, dementia, and early death**

MOOD RELATED ISOLATION

- **The individual may isolate during a depressive episode only to “surface” when their mood improves**
- **The individual may attempt to justify their reclusive or isolating behavior as enjoyable or comfortable**
- **There can be an inner realization on the part of the individual that there is something wrong with their isolating responses which can lead to heightened anxiety**
- **Relationships can be a struggle, as the individual may reconnect with others during a healthier mood only to return to an isolated state during a low or depressed mood**

FACT

- **The magnitude of risk associated with social isolation is comparable with that of cigarette smoking and other major biomedical and psychosocial risk factors**
- **However, our understanding of how and why social isolation is risky for health- or conversely why social ties and relationships are protective of health, still remains quite limited. –James S. House, Psychosomatic Medicine, 2001**

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- **Domestic Violence**
- **Family Crisis**
- **Health and disabilities**
- **Loss of a spouse**
- **Living alone**
- **Unemployment**
- **Aging**
- **Transportation problems**
- **Societal adversity**
- **Missing certain events (such as social gathering, dance etc.)**
- **Substance Abuse**
- **Technology**

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

- **Diminished physical activity**
- **Diminished motor function**
- **Symptoms of depression**
- **Disrupted sleep and daytime dysfunction**
- **Impaired mental and cognitive function**
- **Increased blood pressure**
- **Altered gene expression related to anti-inflammatory responses**
- **Lowered immunity**
- **Increased vulnerability to chronic illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes**
- **Heart disease**
- **Higher levels of stress hormones and inflammation**

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

- **Increases the risks of mental health issues such as depression, dementia, social anxiety and low self-esteem**
- **Example: A person might develop depression because of intense loneliness, then feel even more isolated because of their depression**

RISK FACTORS OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

- **Social isolation can be a precipitating factor for suicidal behavior**
- **Literature suggests that individuals who experience isolation in their lives are more vulnerable to suicide than those who have strong social ties with others**
- **It negatively impacts the development of the brain's structure**
- **In extreme cases of social isolation, studies of young mice and monkeys have shown the brain is strongly affected by the lack of social behavior and relationships**

WHEN DOES IT BEGIN?

- **Social isolation can begin early in life**
- **During the time of development, a person may become more preoccupied with feelings and thoughts of their individuality that are not easy to share with other individuals**
- **This can result from feelings of shame, guilt, or alienation during childhood experiences**
- **It can also coincide with development disabilities**
- **Individuals with learning impairments may have trouble with social interaction**

SOCIAL ISOLATION IN TEENS AND CHILDREN

- **A sense of belonging is an important factor in adolescence for creating social and emotional well-being and academic success**
- **Studies have found that friendship-related loneliness is more explanatory for depressive symptoms among adolescents than parent-related loneliness**
- **Socially isolated children tend to have lower subsequent educational attainment, be part of a less advantaged social class in adulthood, and are more likely to be psychologically distressed in adulthood**
- **Social support is strongly associated with feelings of mastery and the ability to deal with stressful situations, as well as strongly associated with increased quality of life**

SOCIAL ISOLATION IN WOMEN

- **Cultural and social factors can isolate women**
- **Women are often the minority at work or school and feel left out**
- **Motherhood can be isolating. Breastfeeding, the logistics of bottle-feeding, and the physical challenges of traveling with an infant or young child can be contributing factors**
- **Motherhood isolation is a contributing factor to postpartum depression**

SOCIAL ISOLATION IN MEN

- **Men are less likely to admit to feeling lonely**
- **2.5 million men have no close friends. 51% have two or fewer friends**
- **Men are often more reluctant to admit when they are lonely for fear of showing vulnerability**
- **Restrictive norms about how men should think and feel, can play a role in social isolation**

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND GENDER

- **Occurs when people don't identify with the dominant model of gender**
- **People who are genderfluid or nonbinary, may feel isolated or lonely, especially when people around them don't accept or understand their gender**

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND THE ELDERLY

- **The elderly have a unique set of isolating dynamics**
- **Increasing frailty, possible declines in overall health, absent or uninvolved relatives and children, economic struggles can all add to the feeling of isolation**
- **Retirement, the abrupt end of daily work relationships, the death of close friends, or spouses also contributes to social isolation**
- **In the U.S. we bring the elderly to nursing homes if they show severe signs of social isolation. Other societies such as Europe, East Asia and the Caribbean and South America do not use nursing homes, but prefer children or extended family to care for the elderly**

STIGMA

- **It is an especially tricky problem because accepting and declaring our loneliness carries profound stigma**
- **It can feel as though we are admitting that we have failed in life's most fundamental domains: love, belonging, and attachment**
- **It attacks our most basic instincts, to save face, and makes it hard to ask for help**

TIPS TO STAY BETTER CONNECTED

- **Try to stay active and better connected if you**
 - **Live alone or can't leave your home**
 - **Feel alone or disconnected from others**
 - **Recently had a major loss or change**
 - **Are a caregiver**
 - **Lack a sense of purpose**

TIPS

- **Ideas for staying connected**
 - **Find an activity that you enjoy or learn something new. You might have fun and meet people with similar interests**
 - **Get moving! Exercise decreases stress, boosts your mood, and increases your energy**
 - **Volunteer: You'll feel better by helping others**
 - **Stay in touch with friends, family, neighbors in person, online, or on the phone**
 - **Consider adopting a pet-Animals can be a source of comfort and may also lower stress and blood pressure**

TIPS

- **Help people who struggle with transportation find discounted bus passes or special transport services that can help maintain social connections (township senior vans, senior centers, contacting local bus companies)**
- **If the individual is religious they should be encouraged to continue to attend services. They may benefit from the spirituality and the community, as well as the watchful eye of churchgoers**
- **Having someone check in on a parent or grandparent if there is no one local, such as a neighbor**

DOES ANYONE WANT TO SHARE??

Do you have a program in your area that may be beneficial for those suffering from social isolation?



QUESTIONS?

