



factsheet

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Older Adults and Loneliness

Current studies on loneliness suggest that it has harmful impacts on mental and physical health similar to smoking or alcoholism. Loneliness is an issue present in all age groups, but older adults might be at an increased risk because of frequent experiences of loss (such as their spouse, family members and peers), and the movement away from their established social networks to move closer to children or into a long-term care facility. Fortunately, there are various ways that loneliness can be prevented or reduced. Through a review of available literature on loneliness, the following was found:

How is loneliness defined?

There are two types of loneliness:

- Social Loneliness** - lack of social integration
- Emotional Loneliness** - lack or loss of close attachment

What are the risk factors for loneliness?

Loss of a spouse; living in a nursing home or assisted living facility; reduced social activity; increased physical disabilities; increased feelings of irritability, nervousness and uselessness; financial struggles; infrequent contact with family and friends; and receiving community care are all factors that may increase the risk of becoming lonely.

What are the health effects from loneliness?

Loneliness is associated with hypertension; metabolic syndrome; obesity; mortality; being inactive; decline in activities of daily living and mobility; poor self-control on smoking; reports of multiple health-risk behaviours; chronic illnesses; and depression.

loneliness defined

Loneliness can be defined as:

- 1** lack of social integration and emotional loneliness;
- 2** lack or loss of close attachment



What can you do about it?

Access the internet.

Most studies agreed that internet use such as emailing, online communities (Facebook, Skype and Twitter), and instant messaging may help in reducing loneliness.



Interact with a pet.

One study found that older adults who interact with pets were 35% less likely than non-pet owners to report feeling lonely.



Increase physical activity.

Many studies suggest that physical activity reduces the feeling of fatigue and loneliness.



Help others.

Two studies suggested that helping others makes you feel better. When you help others, you are interacting with people in a positive way.

