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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://mcusercontent.com/f61152ebe49ab669a704e18bf/images/dbc99755-1fcb-d931-9783-88f867fe77cd.jpg **Happy Birthday to those born in the month of DECEMBER!**  12/5 - Estelle Oliver  12/8 - Bertie Bell 12/14 - Estella Moses 12/21- Joyce Ann Freeman 12/28 - Mary Moses 12/29 - Emma Tolar | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **The Loneliness Epidemic in the Elderly: Why It Exists.**  AARP's study findings provide a lot of insight into the nature of loneliness in older adults. Check out some of the survey results:   * About 35 percent of adults over the age of 45 are lonely—roughly 47.8 million people. Interestingly, loneliness seems to decrease with age. Those in the oldest age group (i.e., over age 70) are the least lonely; 24 percent of them say they are lonely. * Overall, 29 percent of married older adults are lonely, compared to 51 percent of those who are single. But it's important to note that the quality of a relationship impacts whether a person experiences loneliness: 26 percent of older adults in happy relationships are lonely, compared to 48 percent who are not happy in their relationships. * Income can also play a role. About half of older people with an annual income of less than $25,000 are lonely. * Seniors who are caregivers are more likely to be lonely. This fact is a little surprising, since many caregivers are rarely alone. But looking after other people may leave caregivers with less time to develop their own interests and social connections.   Why are so many older adults feeling lonely? Here are three factors that come into play:   * **Lack of social connections**   Loneliness—as a concept—wasn't written about until the 1700s, and psychologists didn't study it in depth until closer to the middle of the 20th century. Psychologists say that in recent history, the number of meaningful social connections made by people has decreased. And as we've lost those connections, we've increased our risk of being lonely.  For example, because people are, in general, busier and we move from place to place more than we used to, we are less likely to know our neighbors. And the AARP study found that 61 percent of older adults who have never talked to their neighbors are lonely. As well, it seems as if fewer people are reaching out to those around them. In fact, the number of Americans—of any age—who say they have no close friends [has tripled since 1985](https://time.com/3748090/friends-social-health/).  Many of AARP's stats point to the fact that it's the quality, not the quantity, of our social interactions that counts. For example, although one might think that being retired would contribute to feeling lonely, retired people are actually *less* likely to be lonely than people who are still working: According to the AARP study, 29 percent of retired people are lonely, versus 36 percent of those who are still working. People may simply have more time to cultivate close personal connections after retirement.  Here's another fascinating insight: Loneliness seems to be contagious. So if you're surrounded by lonely people, your own chances of feeling isolated are increased. Loneliness can also hinder your ability to read social cues. As a result, lonely people might not notice when others are trying to reach out to them.   * **Living alone**   For much of human history, most people remained close to their families from birth to death. However, more seniors live alone today than ever before, for all kinds of reasons. For example, adult children often move far away from their parents for employment opportunities, and many retired seniors move to places with warmer climates. Take a look at how living alone has changed over time and how it can change with age:  (All of the following stats were drawn from the Administration for Community Living's [2017 Profile of Older Americans](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Aging%20and%20Disability%20in%20America/2017OlderAmericansProfile.pdf), unless otherwise noted.)   * + About 28 percent of older adults live alone today, compared to [6 percent in 1900](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/05/numbers).   + A gender difference exists, largely because the average lifespan for women is longer. That's why 34 percent of older women live on their own, compared to 20 percent of older men.   + By age 75, about 45 percent of women live alone. * **Declining health**   Does poor health cause people to be lonelier, or are lonely people more likely to have poor health? The link between health and loneliness is complex. For example, [lonely people visit the doctor more often](https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302427). But one reason for this might be that they want the social contact they get by attending appointments. Similarly, lonely people are more likely to be depressed. But depression can also cause people to isolate themselves, and isolation can lead to loneliness.  One thing is clear: Mobility issues and health problems impact opportunities for social connection. If you're sick or immobile, you're less likely to have meaningful contact with other people, and that can contribute to loneliness.  **When Loneliness Is a Problem: Warning Signs**  When you feel lonely, you don't need to take a test to know for sure. If you *feel* lonely, you *are* lonely. But remember: Loneliness is not a natural part of growing older. Although many seniors experience it, many others are able to establish and maintain feelings of social connection.  But it can be difficult to tell if someone close to you is affected by loneliness. After all, many seniors don't like to admit they need help. They may be afraid of seeming "old." So it's possible that someone close to you could be suffering without letting you know that they're lonely. Symptoms of loneliness can also be confused with normal signs of growing older.  Some of the signs of loneliness are:   * Sudden neglect of hygiene and personal care * Lack of motivation * Mysterious aches and pains * A noticeable increase in negative thinking and pessimism * A drop in energy levels * Declining interest in social activities * A change in reaching out to you—either less frequently or more frequently * An increase in activities that might be ways of coping with loneliness, such as shopping * An increase in hot baths or showers, which can act as substitutes for the warmth of human contact   If a senior experiences any type personal loss, including the loss of a pet, be aware of any changes in his or her behavior. Recently moving or losing the ability to drive can also trigger loneliness. So if a friend or loved one has experienced an event that could reduce his or her social connections, reach out.  Also, be alert to feelings of increased loneliness if you've experienced a loss or a change in your own life. Addressing these feelings early on will help you in the long run since loneliness can get worse over time if not dealt with.  **Health and Psychological Effects of Loneliness**  Loneliness can affect your health. In fact, the impact on our bodies has been compared to the effect of [smoking 15 cigarettes a day](https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/SCA_Holt_04_27_17.pdf). Being lonely has also been linked to a [26-percent increase](https://time.com/3747784/loneliness-mortality/) in the odds of premature death. Some of the health problems that loneliness can exacerbate include:   * High blood pressure * Heart disease * [Depression](https://www.greatseniorliving.com/health-wellness/depression-in-the-elderly) * Diabetes   The wide range of health problems that can result from feeling alone actually makes sense from an evolutionary standpoint: In prehistoric times, we were more vulnerable to harm if we were by ourselves in the wild. So our bodies have learned to send out alarm signals. As a result, people who describe themselves as lonely have higher levels of cortisol, the "stress hormone." And lonely people often have weaker immune systems.  Loneliness has also been linked to a [40-percent increase](https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-10-massive-loneliness-dementia.html) in a senior's risk of developing [dementia](https://www.greatseniorliving.com/health-wellness/dementia).  So it's normal to feel worried when reading about the health effects of elderly loneliness. Statistics can make it seem as if health problems such as dementia are inevitable if you live alone. But when it comes to your own risk, the numbers don't tell the whole story. Even if you don't have a lot of social contact, you may be one of the many seniors who do just fine.  Keep in mind that social isolation doesn't cause dementia in and of itself. Seniors who experience the early symptoms of dementia might withdraw socially as a result of those symptoms, increasing their loneliness. And lonely seniors may be more likely to do other things that can increase their risk of dementia, such as drinking alcohol in excess.  Here's one of the most important points to remember: Loneliness doesn't have to be permanent. Talk to your doctor if you feel lonely. Your healthcare team will help you create a plan. | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | https://mcusercontent.com/f61152ebe49ab669a704e18bf/images/3a0dabb4-ddd9-94c2-f387-5f8d4e0b928c.jpg  Tue, 12/7: Chair Exercise via zoom -3:00pm  Wed, 12/8: Funny Side of Musical Theatre via zoom - 1:00pm Sponosored By: Arts for the Aging  Thurs, 12/9: Members Walmart Shopping and Lunch - 10:00am 40 Drury Drive LaPlata, MD 20646  Fri, 12/10: 2nd Annual Christmas Musical featuring Levite Band via zoom - 7:00pm  Wed, 12/15: Tai Chi/Qigong via zoom - 5:00pm  Sat, 12/18/21: KCSV Christmas Celebration - 12:30pm Harmony Hall Arts Center 10702 Livingston Road Fort Washington, MD 20744  **Watch for upcoming events** | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **Until Next Time!** | | |