

Loneliness and Mental Health.

May 2024

Experiencing Loneliness and Social Isolation:

Covid-19 Social Distancing.

Faster paced lifestyle. Busy Schedules.

Zoom Fatigue.

Holiday Depression

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

The Loneliness Epidemic:

In recent decades, the number of people with zero confidants has tripled, and most adults do not belong to a local community group.

Consequently, more than 1/3 of Americans over the age of 45 report feeling lonely, with prevalence especially high among those under 25 and over 65 years old.

“We live in the most technologically connected age in the history of civilization,” writes former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, “yet rates of loneliness have doubled since the 1980s.”

Some Facts On The Epidemic Of Loneliness:

- Social connection is linked to a 50% drop in risk of early death.
- Studies show that 40% of wage earners feel isolated at work. Yet, employees who feel they belong are happier, healthier, and more productive than coworkers who feel excluded. They receive twice as many raises and are 18 times more likely to be promoted.
- Plus, employees with a high sense of belonging take 75% fewer sick days than employees who feel excluded—equating to almost \$2.5 million worth of lost productivity each year, per 10,000 workers.

- Increases risk of depression.
- Affects biological stress mechanisms.
- Linked to a 50% increased risk of developing clinical dementia.
- Makes people more likely to rate their health as poor.
- Is an equivalent risk factor for early mortality to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day and has a greater impact than other risk factors such as physical inactivity and obesity.
- Increases the risk of high blood pressure.

Strategies To Address Loneliness and Alleviate Mental Health Strain:

- Reach out to sources of support to help you through the tough times, even though it can be hard to ask for help sometimes. Members of your family, community, or health care providers can be sources of support.
- Devote time and attention to develop and maintain relationships. Regular contact with others helps build social connectedness
- Join a social group to connect with others. Being part of a group with shared interests, values, or goals can be rewarding and foster a sense of belonging.
- Consider the support you give, receive, and have available to you.

“Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated public health crisis that has harmed individual and societal health. Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being hiding in plain sight—one that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled, and more productive lives,” Murthy states. “Given the significant health consequences of loneliness and isolation, we must prioritize building social connection the same way we have prioritized other critical public health issues such as tobacco, obesity, and substance use disorders.”

-Dr. Vivek Murphy

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