

## Condition:



# Social Isolation & Loneliness

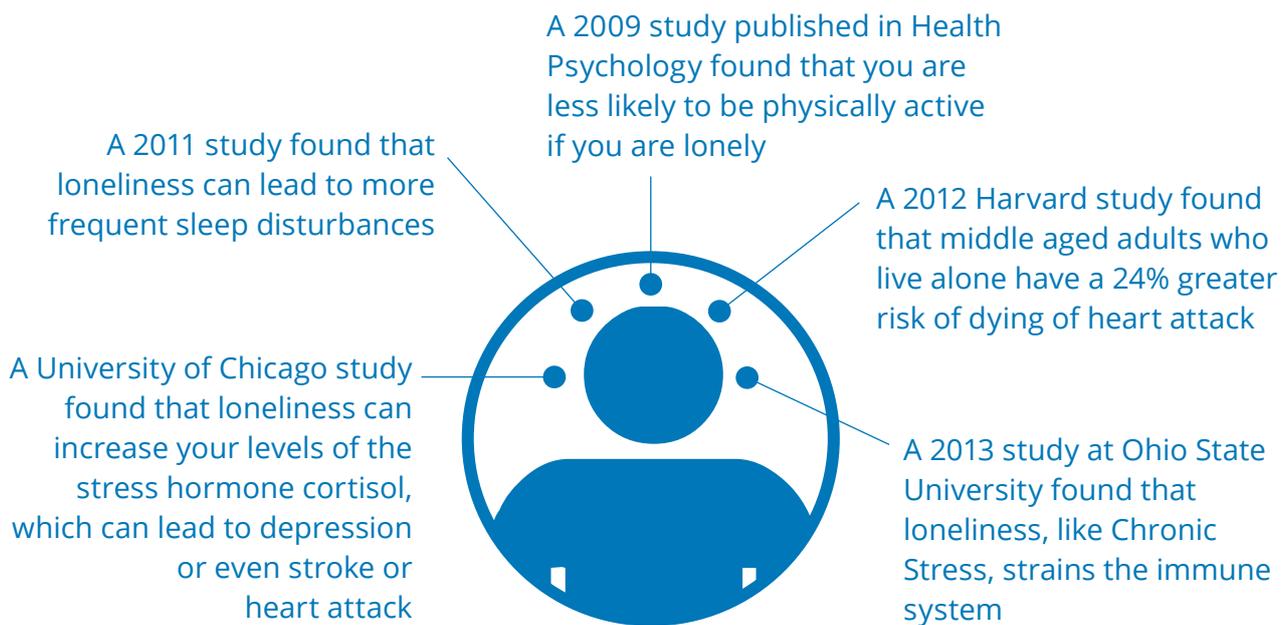
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## What are Social Isolation/Loneliness?

**Social isolation** refers to a complete or near-complete lack of contact with people and society for members of a social species.

**Loneliness** is rooted in temporary lack of contact with other humans.



True social isolation over years causes chronic conditions that can affect aspects of a person's well-being. Social isolation can lead to:

- Feelings of loneliness,
- Fear of others
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of consistent human contact can cause conflict with friends and family as the isolated person may occasionally talk to friends/family members

In the case of mood-related isolation:

- The person 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.
- Heightened Anxiety
- Depression
- Problems sustaining relationships because a person suffering from depression may only connect with others during healthier mood and isolate when going through low or depressive moods.

## Work & Social Isolation/Loneliness

At work you may find it difficult to keep interactions to a minimum as you may work in a team and want to connect with others constantly. Alternatively you may fear that a lack of conversation may come across as being cold or not being a team player. To compensate you may find yourself using a push, push, push approach, thinking if you talk and engage in a lot of conversations others won't think negatively of you. However, what may happen is that you may feel more anxious, your stress levels go up. This will zap your energy and your productivity will go down with increases in your stress levels which may leave you isolating more outside of work.

### Top Tips to help at work:

- **Schedule “me” breaks** throughout the day, do some breathing exercises at your desk.
- **Schedule a ‘walk and buy lunch’ a couple of times a week.** This will give you a break if you need some time for you and a healthy balance of interacting with your work colleagues.
- **Take A Deep Breath** If you're feeling overwhelmed or are coming out of a tense meeting and need to clear your head, a few minutes of deep breathing will restore balance
- **Make sure you schedule in the week social time** and alone time after your working day. Keep connecting either by phone or in person.
- If travelling on public transport to work causes you social anxiety; **listening to music, a podcast or an audio book can be a good distraction.** Reading a book can also distract your focus and attention from negative thoughts and feelings.
- Making friends at work can be a daunting process if you suffer from self-esteem and fear rejection. **Challenge yourself to ask at least one person how are they doing today?** Offer to make a colleague a cup of tea.

## Causes of Social Isolation/Loneliness

There can be many factors that can cause Social Isolation/Loneliness as follows:

- **Domestic violence**  
Perpetrator uses social isolation as a means of controlling their victim.
- **Family crisis**  
Mostly occurs when one member of a family is neglectful or performs an action of harm. The negative affect of this can leave someone in shock and left feeling powerless. Furthermore the symptoms of Isolation could last for an indefinite period of time
- **Health and disabilities**  
People may be embarrassed by their disabilities or health problems, such that they have a tendency to isolate themselves to avoid social interaction out of fear that they would be judged or stigmatised. This is very common with people who have autism and other known disorders.
- **Loss of a spouse**  
If a spouse has recently separated, divorced, or died, the other person may feel lonely and depressed.
- **Living alone**  
The rate of living alone for people under 45 has not changed, but the rate for people aged 45 – 65 has increased over the past 25 years. People over the age of 65 are living alone less often.
- **Unemployment**  
This can be a trigger if anyone was recently fired, dismissed, or released from a job or workplace. This can negatively affect the person and their ability to find or seek future employment.
- **Aging**  
Once a person reaches an age where problems such as cognitive impairments and disabilities arise, they are unable to go out and socialise.
- **Transportation problems**  
If the person doesn't have transportation to attend gatherings or to simply get out of the house, they have no choice but to stay home all day, which can lead to those feelings of depression.

- **Societal adversity**

Desire to avoid the discomfort, dangers, and responsibilities arising from being among people. This can happen if other people are sometimes, or often, rude, hostile, critical or judgmental, crude, or otherwise unpleasant. The person would just prefer to be alone to avoid the hassles and hardships of dealing with people. There are some cases when not even seeing the sun long enough each day will affect them.

- **Missing certain events**

Special events are full of tradition and making memories. However, if a person couldn't attend a special

event, like a social gathering, dance, or any sort of outing/ event, the symptoms of isolation may increase, which can last for an indefinite period of time. Sometimes a person suffering from social isolation/loneliness may have been prevented by another person from attending the event; this could instantly lead to isolation, along with other multiple symptoms, including nervous shock. This in turn can cause the person to keep themselves secluded from any sort of future activity to avoid any further damage.

## Talking to your GP about Social Isolation/ Loneliness

Social Isolation or Loneliness itself is not a diagnosis, but it can be a symptom of other mental health or other conditions that impair social skills and not necessarily by choice. For example, depression, low self-worth and physical disability.

Speak to your GP if you can relate to the following as your GP will be able to offer support to manage symptoms like depression either with medication or a referral into counselling:

- Avoiding people as a result of depression and feelings of shame or low self-esteem/worth
- Find yourself avoiding others because you are fearful of being rejected, being misunderstood or maybe you have a social anxiety
- Is your avoidance impacting negatively on important social or professional relationships? E.g. difficulty keeping a job, arguments and fall outs with family and social relationships.

## How to recognise social Isolation/ Loneliness?

**Social isolation** Is an absence of social relationship and can be an indicator of social isolation. If you are spending excessive time alone, particularly when you no longer benefit from time spent alone. You can recognise if you are becoming or socially isolating as follows:

- Staying at home for days
- Not talking with friends or acquaintances
- Generally avoiding contact with other people
- Generally keeping limited superficial and brief contact with others, while more meaningful, extended relationships remain missing in your life
- Persistently avoiding social interaction for an extended period of time

**Emotional isolation** can occur as a result of social isolation. Emotional isolation can be recognised if you lack any close confidant or intimate person in your life. Even though relationships are necessary for our well-being, relationships can trigger negative feelings and thoughts. In this case you may use emotional isolation as a defence mechanism to protect you from emotional distress. If you are emotionally isolated you may be able to recognise it by the following:

- You keep your feelings completely to yourself
- You find it difficult to receive emotional support from others
- You often feel “shut down” or numb
- You are reluctant or unwilling to communicate with others, except perhaps for the most superficial matters

**Loneliness** The causes of loneliness are varied and include social, mental, emotional and physical factors. Chronic loneliness can be accountable for serious, life-threatening health condition. If you suffer from loneliness you may exhibit the following physical ailments:

- High blood pressure
- High risk of cardiovascular disease
- High risk of stroke
- High cholesterol
- Obesity

## Recommended Treatments

Talking Therapies	Group support/ Activities	Mindfulness
<p>Talking therapies can help you work out how to deal with negative thoughts and feelings and make positive changes. Counsellors can help people who are feeling distressed by difficult events in their lives as well as people with a mental health problem. CBT is a therapy model that looks at how a person's thoughts relate to their behaviour and vice versa. It supports people to understand and change undesired thoughts and behaviours.</p>	<p>Group support/Activities can help to minimise exclusion, build social inclusion and an opportunity to benefit from peer support.</p>	<p>Mindfulness is mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Sometimes your local community may have mindfulness workshops, groups. Mindfulness can also be offered as therapy.</p>

# Self-Management

## What can I do to feel less lonely?

There will be many people who feel like you and there are a number of ways that you can interact more with other people. You should consider what activity you might enjoy and options you could look at include the following.

Ensuring you have a healthy lifestyle and look after your general wellbeing can support you with symptom management. Think about how you can incorporate activities from the 5 ways to wellbeing into your daily routine.



### Give Back

Volunteer for a local charity – most people who volunteer say it is a great way to meet new friends.



### Be Active

To keep busy by activities such as walking, hobbies, gardening, housework, reading or any activity that you find enjoyable.



### Take Notice

Practice relaxation or Mindfulness to ensure you balance your stress levels.



### Connect

Meeting new people, try to ensure you take an interest in what. Could you consider online forums / groups – though do ensure you are careful about who you talk to as not everybody is who they say they are and certain individuals will target people they believe to be lonely.



### Keep learning

Learn a new skill such as a language course or one of the many adult education courses available, these will be listed by your local council.



Make the distinction between loneliness and solitude. Loneliness is time spent that you do not wish to be alone, though solitude can be a good time for reflection and rest and can be enjoyable.

## Useful links

### Summary :

**Social isolation** refers to a complete or near-complete lack of contact with people and society.

**Loneliness** causes people to feel empty, alone, and unwanted. People who are lonely often crave human contact. The cause of loneliness is varied and includes social, mental, emotional and physical factors.

