

Loneliness and Social Isolation

What are Loneliness and Social Isolation?

Loneliness is a feeling of not having meaningful or close relationships or a sense of belonging. Individuals may experience mental or emotional distress from being or feeling that they are alone or separated from others. Social isolation is the lack of relationships with others and little to no social support or contact. This could be due to living in a remote or unsafe area, living alone or other reasons such as severe hearing loss that prevent a person from having a social network. It is possible to feel lonely while among other people, and others can live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated. A person can have a lot of social connections with others and still feel lonely.



Individuals of all ages, backgrounds and income levels are affected by loneliness and social isolation. In 2023, the US Surgeon General issued a report declaring loneliness, isolation, and lack of connections a public health crisis in our country, citing that half of adults even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, reported experiencing loneliness.

How Does Loneliness and Social Isolation Affect Your Health? Social isolation and loneliness can increase risks for:

- Depression and anxiety
- More sedentary lifestyle
- Suicide and self-harm
- Obesity
- Alcohol and substance use
- Sleep problems
- Weakened immune function
- Heart disease and stroke
- Type 2 diabetes
- Dementia
- Earlier death
- Malnutrition

Osteopathic Physicians and the Health Professional Team Care for All Patients' Overall Well-Being

Osteopathic physicians play an integral role in addressing issues that address health and quality of life including loneliness and social isolation. As trusted sources of health information and guidance, DOs partner with patients to improve physical and emotional health and well-being.

Osteopathic physicians:

- Focus on understanding the patient as a complete individual, addressing the health of the body, mind, and spirit.

Scan to access:



- Believe there is more to good health than the absence of pain or disease and provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to treating patients.
- Support each patient in achieving a high level of wellness by focusing on physical and behavioral health and the individual's environment.

Ways to Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation

- Talk to your physician if you are feeling isolated or lonely and if there are major changes in your life that may be causing stress. Share information about how you feel physically, emotionally, and mentally. Health professionals can also assist with identifying community-based resources and support programs.
- Keep physically and mentally active and find activities that you enjoy. Seek out individuals with similar interests as sources of support and a social network.
- Set aside time each day to connect with family, friends, and neighbors.
- Volunteer to assist others in need. Volunteering helps you feel less lonely and gives you a sense of mission and purpose in life.
- Enjoy the companionship of a pet. Animals are a source of comfort and can reduce the feeling of loneliness. Consider adopting a pet if you are able to care for them, volunteer at a local shelter, or seek out a community pet therapy program.
- Learn about resources and programs in your community that you will enjoy and also find a social connection with others.
- Directly engage with people and reduce use of technology.
- If you need to communicate with others through technology, try to use communication techniques that allow video conferencing.
- Consider connecting with your spirituality and possibly joining a faith community providing social networking and spiritual and emotional support.
- Community programs such as Senior Centers and Community Food Delivery for homebound seniors such as Meals on Wheels America (www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org) may also be helpful.
- Write down 5 things you love about yourself. When people are lonely, they may start thinking negatively. Writing down positive things about yourself increases self-esteem.



Resources

[Loneliness and Social Isolation Tips](#)

[Health Risks of Social Isolation and Loneliness](#)

[Friendly Voice: Connecting People to People](#)

[Well Connected](#)

[Ready to Volunteer... Now What? A Guide for Older Adults on Giving Back](#)

[Mental Health Fact Sheet – Isolation and Loneliness - VA.gov](#)

[2023 Surgeon General Report-Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](#)