

Social Connection & Healthy Aging

Information about
social isolation &
loneliness for
older adults



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CCSMH

Canadian Coalition for
Seniors' Mental Health
Connecting People, Ideas
and Resources

Staying connected for better health

Growing older brings many transitions. Older adults may face feelings of social isolation or loneliness that can have an impact on their mental or physical health. But this isn't an inevitable part of aging. Staying connected is important for maintaining mental and physical health as we age.

This pamphlet describes the concept of social isolation and loneliness, its impact and what we can do to stay connected for better health.



Defining social isolation and loneliness

These two terms are often found together. However, they do not mean the same thing.

- **Social isolation** can be understood as a measurable lack in the number of relationships a person has.
- **Loneliness** is more subjective and can be understood as the feeling we get when our social relationships are lacking in terms of quality or quantity compared with what we expect them to be.



Everyone experiences isolation and loneliness differently. We may not always feel lonely when we're alone, and some of us may need fewer social relations than others in order to feel connected.

Navigating life changes

As we age, we face life transitions. These can add to the risk of becoming socially isolated or lonely. Some of us may face fewer family connections, the loss of a spouse, or fewer ways to stay in touch with communities.

Some changes that may raise the risk of social isolation and loneliness include:

- Retirement
- Loss of a spouse, friends or family
- Change in residence
- Changing health conditions, including:
 - Hearing loss
 - Loss of vision
 - Limited mobility



Understanding who is at greater risk

Some groups of people are at greater risk for social isolation and loneliness, including:

- Women
- Older adults living with low income or in poverty
- Indigenous older adults
- 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults
- Care providers for older adults



A growing concern

In Canada, we face growing rates of social isolation and loneliness.



As many as 41% of Canadians aged 50 years and older are at risk of social isolation.



Up to 58% have experienced loneliness.

Among Canadians aged 50–64 years:



Almost one in four (23%) are very lonely.



Another 41% are somewhat lonely.

*From the National Institute on Ageing:
[Understanding the Factors Driving the Epidemic of Social Isolation and Loneliness among Older Canadians \(2023\).](#)*



Knowing the risks

Some health risks of isolation and loneliness among adults over 50 years old include:

32% increased risk of stroke

25% increased risk of cancer mortality

50% increased risk of developing dementia

45% increased risk of death

From the National Institute on Ageing: [Understanding Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Canadians and How to Address It \(2022\)](#).



Staying connected

Staying socially connected may mitigate these risks and contribute to better physical and mental health. Just as we may need to pay attention to how our bodies and minds age, we can also find opportunities to renew existing or find new relationships to boost our social health.



Connection can also mean taking time to do things we enjoy or are passionate about. This can include getting out in nature, reading, gardening and listening to or playing music. Physical activity can also be good for our mental and physical health.



Learning from older adults' experiences

We know that everyone has different ways to stay connected. In researching social isolation and loneliness among older adults in Canada, we asked respondents to rank their preferred activities to address feeling socially isolated or alone.

These were their top choices:

- Spending time with friends or family
- Exercising or taking part in exercise classes
- Using technology to connect with friends and family
- Spending time in nature
- Participating in hobbies
- Volunteering
- Visiting or joining programs at a community centre



Talking with a care provider

The Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health is working with health care and social service professionals to deepen their understanding of social isolation and loneliness among older adults, and to provide them with guidelines that can support them as they support their patients or clients.

Your health care or social service professional may be interested in the clinical guidelines and related resources on our website:



www.ccsmh.ca

Contacts for information & resources

Use this area to record numbers of organizations and services that can help you.

Emergency: 911

Suicide Crisis Helpline: 988

**Community and
services information: 211**

**Red Cross
Friendly Calls: 1-833-979-9779**

Doctor's office: _____

**Local branch of the
Canadian Mental
Health Association:** _____

**Local seniors' centre
or community centre:** _____





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For more information visit the
Canadian Coalition for Seniors'
Mental Health (CCSMH) website:

ccsmh.ca

This brochure is adapted from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH) Canadian Clinical Guidelines on Social Isolation and Loneliness (2024).

Disclaimer: This brochure is intended for information purposes only. It is not intended to be interpreted or used as a standard of medical practice.
