



Social Isolation & Loneliness in Society

- According to the AARP Foundation, social isolation affects more than **8 million** age 50-plus adults and is growing as **10,000** Americans a day turn 65.
- Approximately **1/3** of Americans older than 65 live alone, and **half** of those over 85 do.ⁱ
- According to a recent study by the National Council on Aging, an estimated **17%** of all Americans over the age of 65 are isolated because they live alone and face one or more barriers related to geographic location, language, or disability.
- People with poorer health – particularly those with mood disorders like anxiety and depression – are more likely to feel lonelyⁱⁱ

Health Impacts of Social Isolation & Loneliness

- **Loneliness is a major risk factor for depression**, which accelerates decline and increases mortalityⁱⁱⁱ.
- The strength of social isolation as a predictor of mortality is similar to that of well-documented clinical risk factors, such as smoking and high blood pressure^{iv}.
- Research indicates that loneliness is a risk factor for, and may contribute to, **poorer overall cognitive performance, faster cognitive decline, poorer executive functioning, increased negativity and depressive cognition, heightened sensitivity to social threats**, a confirmatory bias in social cognition that is self-protective and paradoxically self-defeating^v.
- Loneliness can impair health by raising levels of stress hormones and inflammation, which in turn can **increase the risk of heart disease, arthritis, Type 2 diabetes, dementia and even suicide attempts**^{vi}.
- Individuals who lack social connections or report frequent feelings of loneliness tend to suffer **higher rates of morbidity and mortality, as well as infection, depression, and cognitive decline**.
- One recent study found that isolation **increases the risk of heart disease by 29% and stroke by 32%**.^{vii}
- Social relationships – both quantity and quality – affect mental and physical health. Adults who are more socially connected are healthier and live longer than their more isolated peers^{viii}.

ⁱ https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/22/upshot/how-social-isolation-is-killing-us.html?_r=0

ⁱⁱ https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/aarp_foundation/2012_PDFs/AARP-Foundation-Isolation-Framework-Report.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Caspi A, Harrington H, Moffitt TE, Milne BJ, Poulton R. Socially isolated children 20 years later: Risk of cardiovascular disease. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2006;160:805–811.

^{iv} Pantell, Matthew, et al. "Social isolation: a predictor of mortality comparable to traditional clinical risk factors." *American journal of public health* 103.11 (2013): 2056-2062.

^v Cacioppo, John T., and Louise C. Hawkey. "Perceived social isolation and cognition." *Trends in cognitive sciences* 13.10 (2009): 447-454.

^{vi} <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/11/well/mind/how-loneliness-affects-our-health.html>

^{vii} CORNWELL EY, WAITE LJ. Social Disconnectedness, Perceived Isolation, and Health among Older Adults. *Journal of health and social behavior.* 2009;50(1):31-48.

^{viii} Umberson, Debra, and Jennifer Karas Montez. "Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy." *Journal of health and social behavior* 51.1_suppl (2010): S54-S66