

Loneliness

Despite it being easier than ever to contact other people, loneliness is becoming an increasing problem. Why is this?

What is loneliness?

- Loneliness is an emotional response to isolation or lack of companionship. It often includes anxiety about being disconnected from other people or not having anyone to turn to in times of distress or depression.
- Loneliness is an emotion - like happiness, sadness or surprise - and has nothing to do with whether you are a good person or a good friend.

Who is most likely to feel lonely?

- Elderly people or people experiencing a relationship break down often feel unwanted or uncared for which can trigger loneliness.
- Grief is a common cause of loneliness as the person feels deserted by others.
- Some people are lonely because they have difficulty connecting with others – they may have poor communication skills, not speak the language or be from a different culture.
- People who are veterans, have chronic pain, illness or a disability may become lonely as they may believe they are different or unlikeable.
- Carers, solo parents or new mothers often experience loneliness as they become are isolated by their responsibilities to care for others.

Why is loneliness a bad thing?

- From early times humans have lived together in groups. Historically, this provided protection from predators and other threats. Living alone meant you'd have to be on constant alert for danger – it creates stress even in our modern environment.
- Stress causes higher amounts of stress hormones to be released- these contribute to inflammation which is related to heart disease, stroke, increased blood pressure and depression.
- Loneliness has also been associated with higher cholesterol, a decline in cognitive abilities, anxiety and Alzheimer's.

What can you do to change loneliness?

- If you're feeling lonely, start by expanding your mind rather than your social circle! You can't experience two emotions at once so concentration of positive aspects of your interaction with others – this reminds us of how we're connected to others!
- After a phone call or talking with somebody think about one good thing that happened – a joke, a smile, a useful bit of information, a shared interest.
- Each day write down at least one good thing that happened that involved another person – a compliment, laughter, a shared experience - have a diary of happy events you can look back on.
- Experience gratitude – when somebody unexpectedly does something to help you acknowledge it! It may be as small as letting you jump the line in the supermarket!
- Rediscover a sense of purpose or meaning in life – learn something new, develop a skill, find a new interest. Passion and enthusiasm will swamp loneliness!

What if this loneliness is overwhelming?

- If you are feeling overwhelmed by loneliness, feel you can't leave the house or speak to others you may need help from a health care professional – a doctor or psychologist.
- If you are feeling suicidal or homicidal it is essential that you speak to a doctor as soon as possible.