



by Select Rehabilitation

Living Well,
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Healthy Living Series

October 2019: Avoiding Social Isolation by Staying Connected

Resources for Residents, Caregivers and Staff



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Avoiding Social Isolation by Staying Connected

Social isolation is defined as a lack of meaningful contact with others. More than 8 million adults age 50 and older are affected by social isolation. Although older adults are one of the highest risk groups for social isolation, few individuals think it will happen to them. Often people do not notice the signs of isolation in themselves and their family. Social relationships affect mental health, health behavior, physical health, and mortality risk. The prevalence of isolation among older adults who live at home may be as high as 43%. With the number of older adults projected to increase exponentially, social isolation will likely impact the health, well-being and quality of life of numerous individuals.

How can you stay connected with others? It is important to nurture and strengthen existing relationships. As an example, invite people over for coffee or call them to suggest a trip to a museum or to see a movie. Additionally, don't let being a non-driver stop you from staying active. Find out about your transportation options in your community. Social media like Facebook can also be a good resource to stay in touch with long-distance friends or write a letter. You can take a class to learn something new and, at the same time, expand your circle of friends. Likewise, revisit an old hobby you've set aside and connect with others who share your interests. Similarly, visit your local community wellness or senior center and become involved in a wide range of interesting programs. You can also check out faith-based organizations for spiritual engagement, as well as to participate in activities and events.

How can rehabilitation help? The purpose of therapy is to increase an individual's ability to live as independently as possible in the community while engaging in meaningful and productive life roles. Because therapy facilitates participation and is client-centered, it plays an important role in the success of those at risk for social isolation. Your rehab team can offer educational programs and treatment groups or classes to address self-awareness, interpersonal and social skills, stress management, and role development. Therapy can work with clients to achieve their highest level of self-performance in functional skills which may prevent social isolation. Your rehab team can assist in the development and instruction of compensatory and adaptation techniques to facilitate increased functional performance, attention and safety. Therapy can also deliver interventions to preserve mobility, socialization and ADL skills.

For additional information, please contact your Select Rehabilitation Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists. In addition, consult your rehab team today if you are concerned that you or your loved one may be dealing with social isolation.

AVOIDING SOCIAL ISOLATION BY STAYING CONNECTED **TALKING POINTS**

More than 8 million adults age 50 and older are affected by social isolation. Although older adults are one of the highest risk groups for social isolation, few individuals think it will happen to them. Often people do not notice the signs of isolation in themselves and their family. Social relationships affect mental health, health behavior, physical health, and mortality risk. The prevalence of isolation among older adults who live at home may be as high as 43%. With the number of older adults projected to increase exponentially, social isolation will likely impact the health, well-being and quality of life of numerous individuals.

Research from the AARP Public Policy Institute, Stanford University, and Harvard finds that Medicare spends an estimated \$6.7 billion each year on older adults who have little social contact with others. These individuals were more likely to have depression, difficulties managing daily activities, and have at least five chronic conditions. The study found that Medicare spent about \$1,600 each year on older adults who are socially isolated than those who are not. The study participants were one-third more likely to die within six years.

What is social isolation?

- It is defined as a lack of meaningful contact with others.
- The North American Nursing Diagnosis Association's diagnosis of isolation examines the following four characteristics: insecurity in social situations, a lack of meaningful relationships, expressed feelings of rejection, and a desire for contact with more people.
- It is a significant risk factor for poor health status and increased mortality.

Social isolation among older adults

- Many older adults become more isolated as they age.
- Loss of social contacts due to retirement, loss of loved ones and friends, and declining health may account for the effects of aging on diminished social connectedness.
- Increased frailty and disability may also play a role in age-related social isolation.
- Poor health may lead to older adults' isolation, or they may be isolated first, which contributes to their poor health outcomes.

What are the risk factors for social isolation?

- Living alone;
- Impaired mobility (physical, poor sensory functions);
- Experiencing a major life transition (loss of partner/spouse or other primary network members, employment, or resources in general);
- Socioeconomic status (low income, limited resources);
- Being a caregiver for someone with a severe chronic disability or illness;



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- Having psychological or cognitive vulnerabilities (depression, low self-esteem, compromised self-efficacy, addiction);
- Location (rural, unsafe or inaccessible neighborhood/community);
- Small social network and/or inadequate social support;
- Language (non-English speaking); and
- Belonging to a minority group (an ethnic and/or racial minority group, the LGBTQ community, or a religious or other cultural minority group).

Who is at risk of being socially isolated?

- Older adults are at increased risk of being socially isolated.
- By the time people reach their 80s, many individuals live on their own, mostly because of widowhood.
- This is particularly the case for older women who are more likely to be widowed than older men.
- Older individual's social networks often get smaller for other reasons as well – children may have moved away, along with grandchildren, and aging siblings and friends may have died.
- Living alone, health problems and disability, sensory impairment such as hearing loss, and major life events such as loss of a spouse have all been identified as risk factors.

What are the detrimental health effects of social isolation?

- An increased number of falls
- An increased risk for all-cause mortality
- An increased risk for dementia
- An increased risk for re-hospitalization

How to address social isolation?

- **Address incontinence issues**
 - An older adult may be hesitant to leave their home if they are experiencing incontinence.
 - When family caregivers and health professionals make sure that incontinence issues are appropriately addressed, for example through medications and supplies, individuals can have a better opportunity to recognize their social potentials and live life without embarrassment and fear.
- **Encourage dining with others**
 - Eating with others is inherently social.
 - Encourage older adults to share a meal with others whenever possible.
 - Dining with others may help promote better nutrition.
- **Encourage hearing and vision tests**
 - Older adults with undiagnosed or untreated hearing and vision problems may avoid social situations because of difficulty communicating.
 - Encourage individuals to have their hearing checked and hearing problems treated.
 - Encourage older adults to have their vision checked and vision problems treated.

- **Give extra support to individuals who have lost a family member, friend or spouse**
 - Older adults may be at risk for becoming socially isolated during the period after a family member, friend or spouse has passed away.
 - It's important to provide extra emotional and social support to individuals while they are grieving.
- **Help out a caregiver**
 - Family caregivers who are helping to care for a loved one may be more concerned about the social well-being of the person they are caring for than their own social well-being.
 - Caregiving can trigger social isolation.
 - Caregivers often work by themselves, and more than half (53%) say they have less time for friends and family.
 - All too often, they don't call doctors when they are sick and they have little or no time to exercise or eat well.
 - Studies show that up to 70% of caregivers have clinically significant symptoms of depression.
 - If you are a caregiver, remember to take care of yourself. It's not just the person you are caring for who's at risk of social isolation.
- **Identify isolated older adults**
 - Often family members will be the first to notice when social isolation is affecting a loved one's well-being, but not all individuals have the benefit of loved ones who live nearby and can check on their well-being.
 - Health and caregiving professionals should be on the lookout for signs of social isolation in their clients so that appropriate interventions can be arranged.
- **Make adaptive technologies available**
 - Adaptive technologies help older adults to compensate for age-related deficits and deficiencies that can impede social interaction.
 - At times, individuals do not take full advantage of these devices. Sometimes they may be embarrassed. In other cases, the device may be overly expensive and not covered by insurance.
- **Make transportation more readily available**
 - Lack of adequate transportation is a primary cause of a social isolation.
 - Because many older adults do not drive, anything that helps individuals get around and make independent choices about travel promotes their social health.
 - Providing transportation options to older adults will help promote their social integration.
 - Family offering rides to older loved ones and helping them use public transportation will also help them maintain social connections and a healthy sense of independence.
- **Promote a sense of purpose**
 - Individuals with a sense of purpose are less likely to experience the effects of social isolation.
 - Many hobbies and interests are inherently social in nature.
 - Volunteering is a great way of maintaining and expressing a sense of purpose.



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How can you connect with others?

- Nurture and strengthen existing relationships.
 - Invite people over for coffee or call them to suggest a trip to a museum or to see a movie.
 - Schedule a time each day to call a friend or visit someone.
- Don't let being a non-driver stop you from staying active.
 - Find out about your transportation options.
- Use social media like Facebook to stay in touch with long-distance friends or write a letter.
- Take a class to learn something new and, at the same time, expand your circle of friends.
- Revisit an old hobby you've set aside and connect with others who share your interests.
- Visit your local community wellness or senior center and become involved in a wide range of interesting programs.
- Check out faith-based organizations for spiritual engagement, as well as to participate in activities and events.

What resources are available for those that are socially isolated?

- The following national resources can provide a support for older adults that are experiencing isolation.
 - Eldercare Locator
 - The Eldercare Locator is a referral resource to provide support to consumers seeking assistance across the spectrum of issues affecting older adults.
 - Through its national call center (800.677.1116) and website (www.eldercare.gov), the locator serves as a gateway for older adults and caregivers searching for information and resources which can be crucial to their health, well-being and independence.
 - Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)
 - AAAs provides a welcoming environment for older adults and caregivers interested in participating in social and health promotion activities, as well as a range of services such as meals, transportation and in-home services.
 - To learn more about the AAA in your area, call the Eldercare Locator (800.677.1116) or visit www.eldercare.gov.
 - Connect2Affect
 - An online resource featuring tools and information to help evaluate isolation risk, reach out to others who may be feeling lonely and disengaged, and find practical ways to reconnect to community.
 - To learn more at visit connect2affect.org.

How can rehabilitation help?

- The purpose of therapy is to increase an individual's ability to live as independently as possible in the community while engaging in meaningful and productive life roles. Because therapy facilitates participation and is client-centered, it plays an important role in the success of those at risk for social isolation.



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- Seeking professional advice to analyze your unique situation; can often result in simple solutions.
- Your rehab team can provide educational programs and treatment groups or classes to address self-awareness, interpersonal and social skills, stress management, and role development.
- Your rehab team can provide clients the opportunity to achieve their highest level of self-performance in functional skills.
- Your rehab team can assist in the development and instruction of compensatory and adaptation techniques to facilitate increased functional performance, attention and safety.
- Your rehab team can provide interventions to preserve mobility, socialization and ADL skills.
- Your rehab team can provide clients purposeful activities according to capabilities.

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It is important to communicate with nursing and activities staff regarding recent changes in client's functional skills and/or participation in activities/leisure tasks.

Ask specific questions, such as "Do you notice clients who:"

- Require more/less supervision/additional care to complete/perform functional tasks?
- Are limited by physical or cognitive ability to participate in mobility tasks?
- Are limited by physical or cognitive ability to participate in ADL tasks?
- Have difficulty using compensatory techniques previously successful in using?
- Have difficulty understanding verbal or non-verbal stimuli?
- Cannot sequence portions of mobility and/or ADL tasks?
- Demonstrate confusion or misuse of assistive device(s)?
- Inconsistently perform ADL tasks
- Need an excessive amount of time to complete ADL
- Express desire to participate more in ADL tasks
- Express frustration at loss of function
- Demonstrate inappropriate behavior during ADL tasks
- Have difficulty accepting their disability
- Want to do more for themselves
- Talk more about what they used to be able to do
- Do not participate at their maximum potential or skill level
- Are not currently completing ADLs but who have the potential to participate
- Are having difficulty falling asleep or maintaining sleep
- Have declined in ROM?
- Experience frequent falls?
- Have difficulty using compensatory techniques previously successful in using?
- Have difficulty understanding verbal or non-verbal stimuli?
- Are at risk for contracture development?
- Have experienced change in pain status, altering ability to participate in activities?
- Demonstrate confusion or misuse of assistive device(s)?
- Have recurrent pneumonia or cold-like symptoms?
- Have significant weight loss?
- Become easily frustrated, leading to behavioral outbursts?
- Get out of bed on limited basis?

Healthy Living Series Talk Follow Up Form

We would like to know if today's topic has been a concern to you which may affect any activities in your day to day life. Please take a moment to complete this questionnaire and indicate if you would like us to contact you regarding your concerns:

<i>Please mark any areas of concern below</i> ↓	
Daily Activities:	I am concerned about:
Cooking	
Ability to Dress	
Housekeeping	
Laundry	
Shopping	
Hobbies	
Travel	
Church or Temple	
Medication Management	
Bathing/ Hygiene	
Social:	
Remembering appointments	
Going to Friends Homes	
Forgetting names	
Hearing	
Self Perception:	
Physical Health	
Fear of Hygiene Issues	
Fear of Embarrassment	

Please enter your name and phone number if you would like us to contact you:

NAME: _____ NUMBER: _____