

Social Isolation in Older Age:

**HOW TO GET
CONNECTED AND KEEP
THE PARTY GOING!**



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Why Is This A Problem:

Unfortunately, the problem of social isolation becomes increasingly prominent as we age and face heightened risks of exclusion (Walsh et al., 2017). So, what is social isolation you may ask; is it the same as being lonely? The answer is actually no. While these terms are related, they cannot be used interchangeably. Social isolation is a lack of social connectedness that can be measured by the amount of social contact a person has, or the size of their social network (Zavaleta et al., 2017). Loneliness, on the other hand, is the emotional state of dissatisfaction with social contact that someone feels (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). However, these things do not always go hand in hand. Just because someone is considered socially isolated does not automatically mean that they are feeling lonely, and vice versa. Someone considered socially isolated may be happy being alone, while someone with a large social network may still feel lonely (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015).

However, our need to maintain a strong social network with frequent social contact is essential to our quality of life and overall health throughout the lifespan. Social isolation is a very problematic reality that affects a whopping 35% of the older adult population (Hammig, 2019). Those who are experiencing social isolation become cut off from potential support and assistance, and experience negative impacts overall health (Barney & Perkinson, 2016). Therefore, it is extremely important to examine the quality of our social support systems and quantity of social interactions in order to avoid the consequences of social isolation. Some possible contributors to social isolation include living alone, having few people in your social network, and having infrequent social contact (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). This puts those who have lost a partner, family members, or friends, and those who have limited social contact at a greater risk for social isolation (Khosravi et al., 2016). It is important to remain mindful of these risk factors, and if you or someone you know is experiencing social isolation, use the resources below as a tool to regain connectedness with friends/family, or build new meaningful relationships!

Potential Approaches to Get Connected:

Simply read the description to each resource below, click the link underlined in [red](#), and follow the website prompts to get connected.

Getting back in the dating game:

- [Silver singles](#) and [Elite singles](#): Dating websites for adults over 50 looking for romance or companionship. Both have you take a personality test and match you up with compatible members!
- [Senior friend finder](#): Website for adults over the age of 60 looking for a relationship, or a friendship finder
- [SeniorMatch](#): Dating website for singles over the age of 50

Making new friendships:

- **Making local, in person friendships:**
 - Take free classes at [local colleges/universities](#) to meet people, and gain some knowledge in various subject areas
 - Find a local [senior center](#) in your area with daily/weekly activities
 - Join [Meetup.com](#) to find a group of similar aged adults who meet up to engage in something you enjoy such as cooking or hiking
 - Find a [volunteer opportunity](#) of interest to you as a way to get out of the house, meet some new people, and make some new friends
 - Check out local churches in your area to see if they offer any outings or small group meetings to attend and meet people
 - Find a local [senior fitness class](#) to join to get out, get active, and make some new friends in a weekly class
 - Joint [Stitch](#) to indicate your interests (going to dinner, traveling, or doing a group activity), and find seniors in your area to join you
- **Making online friendships:**
 - Playing games such a pool, cards, monopoly, or various word searches while chatting with people around the world
 - [Pogo.com](#), [AARP](#), [jigsawpuzzles.com](#), [gamehouse.com](#)

Rekindling old friendships:

- Get on [Facebook](#), pull out the old yearbooks and reconnect with friends from grade school or college
- Call up an old friend that you haven't heard from in awhile

Improving family ties:

- Reach out to family members you haven't talked to recently! Plan an outing together or pull out the old photo albums and talk about good memories!

Safety Considerations Online Communication:

- Tips for meeting someone you met online for the first time:
 - o Meet in a well-lit, public location such as a restaurant
 - o Tell a friend or family member where/when you are going
- Don't click on any pop-up advertisements. Computer hackers like to use these pop-up's as a way to gain access to and damage your computer.
- Be cautious of how much personal information you give out to people online. Do not disclose things like your last name or location.
- Be cautious of any websites that require recurrent payment and beware of entering your credit card information into any websites

Other Professionals/Services That Could Be Helpful:

- **Counselors:** See a family counselor to communicate anything that might be difficult for you to bring up to family members or emend relationships
- **Psychologist:** See a psychologist if you are going through some personal struggles that may be hindering your social participation, or to discuss feelings resulting from social isolation
- **Physical therapist:** See a physical therapist if you are having trouble getting around which is impacting your ability to go out and be social
- **Social worker:** Meeting with a social worker to help find other ways to expand your social networks and ensure all your social needs are being met

How This Could Help Improve Occupational Engagement

Being socially isolated impacts all areas of our lives; our body's psychosocial functions, our environment, and especially how we participate in various activities. I hope that you can utilize these tips above in order to increase your occupational engagement in civic life, with a focus on facilitating socialization with others. For example, someone experiencing social isolation might not participate in preferred activities that require more than one person such as playing a board game or talking on the phone. If that same person followed the tips above and was able to connect with another person that was not previously apart of their social network, their interpersonal connections and opportunities to participate in these activities and many others expand! Our ability to make and maintain interpersonal relationships/interactions is a huge facilitator to our activities and participation. People tend to engage in more activities when they have other people there to motivate them. So, if you are experiencing social isolation, get out there and increase your social support system, change the way you participate in your environment, and increase your quality of life.

References

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