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Effects of Isolation in Elderly Populations

If you have family or friends who are elderly, it is important to recognize the value in spending time with them – research shows that making those connections may literally prolong their life. As we age, and our ability to be on the go and socialize diminishes, then our world gets smaller and smaller. This can often lead to feelings of loneliness and eventually depression.

The centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported, “Although it’s hard to measure social isolation and loneliness precisely, there is strong evidence that many adults aged 50 and older are socially isolated or lonely in ways that put their health at risk.”

The article also reports that:

- Social isolation significantly increased a person’s risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.
- About 50% of social isolation is associated with increased risk of dementia.
- 29% increased risk of heart disease and 32% increased risk of stroke are associated with poor social relationships characterized by social isolation or loneliness.
- Loneliness is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.
- Loneliness among heart failure patients is associated with almost 4 times increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of emergency department visits.

There are many varied factors which may prevent individuals from socialization including health concerns, financial restrictions, and loss of loved ones as we get older. As the temperatures outside get hotter during this time of year, it will be hard on older individuals and may hinder them getting out as much too. Whatever the reason, there are many ways to combat isolation.

Spending time every week with individuals who have limited access to social situations can help them stay physically, emotionally, and mentally healthier. The National Institute on Aging reports, “Being alone may leave older adults more vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation, which can affect their health and well-being. Studies show that loneliness and social isolation are

associated with higher risks for health problems such as heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline.” If meeting in person is not an option, a phone call, email, letter, having a zoom or using face time through modern technology, can often make all the difference in a person’s life. The most important thing is reaching out, so others do not feel so alone.

Another step you can take to increase socialization is looking at the programs in your area that provide services and events for the elderly. Most communities have a Senior Center, which offers many activities. There are over 600 Area Agencies on Aging organizations that provide information and assistance with programs, caregiver support, and more. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) provides helpful information to seniors to help improve their quality of life and provides access to Community Connection Tools.

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