

Beating the Holiday Blues

12/13/2024

Beating the Holiday Blues

Family togetherness, social gatherings, and nostalgic memories are often a source of holiday cheer – but for those missing loved ones or struggling to feel included, these experiences can amplify feelings of isolation. Loneliness is not only an uncomfortable emotional experience; it also poses significant health risks. Older adults are particularly vulnerable to loneliness: according to the [National Poll on Healthy Aging](#), one in three adults ages 50 – 80 reported feeling lonely in 2023.

Age-related functional difficulties may discourage older adults from participating in social activities. Hearing loss and memory impairment can make it difficult to hear and track conversations, making participation in group social activities daunting, and older adults who no longer drive or have mobility limitations may be unable to travel to holiday gatherings. Grief and loss can also lead to feelings of isolation even in people with strong social support networks. [Dr. Allison Moder Mays, a geriatrician at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center](#), reminds us that “this can be a particularly difficult time of the year for anyone who has experienced loss or who doesn't have that sense of community they wish they had. And that really is what defines loneliness—not having the social connections that you want.” Recent research on loneliness has identified accessible interventions that can temper feelings of isolation.

[Participating in just one act of kindness per week](#) over four weeks reduced loneliness, stress, and social anxiety. Acts of kindness include things as simple as lending a listening ear to a friend in need, sharing advice about hobbies with a neighbor, and supporting a local business. Other activities such as volunteering and helping others out with chores have also been found to support wellbeing.

[Participating in online or in-person group exercise classes](#) also reduced feelings of loneliness in older adults. In a study offering exercise classes 1 – 3 times a week over 6 months, participants who attended as few as 40% of classes saw mental health benefits, highlighting that even occasional engagement in group activities can make a big difference in feelings of community and connectedness.

[Religiosity](#) has also been associated with higher levels of social support, although these benefits are only seen for those who attend religious services. More frequent attendance corresponds with greater social support and social connectedness.

Those seeking immediate social support may consider engaging with support networks. Visit [Mental Health America's](#) online peer support community, which contains sections for different support topics such as grief, wellness and overall health, and caregiving. If you prefer to communicate by telephone can dial 1-800-971-0016 to reach The Friendship Line, a 24-hour hotline offering social support to adults ages 60 and over. Friendship Line volunteers provide a variety of services, including friendly conversation, an empathetic ear, and connection with outreach services.