

5 Negative Effects of Loneliness on Physical and Mental Health

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The feeling of loneliness or being detached from others is not just a human emotion; it is a complex emotional response to the lack of companionship. Although, days pass by with tremendous speed forcing each one of us to run with it at its pace. But if we take a moment to stand and think about our relations and friendships, how many of us enjoy true companionship? It is said that one in every five persons is lonely and a majority of people don't have anyone to talk to or spend time with, and this rate is increasing rapidly. Loneliness has increased with modernization, since people are engrossed in virtual social communities and networks and don't have the urge to attend social gathering or stay in touch with family and friends. But, with time, loneliness and lack of companionship makes people vulnerable which affects physical and mental health to increases the chances of [mental health disorders](#).



6 Common Causes of Loneliness

Research shows that loneliness is connected to genetics but there are several external factors that lead to loneliness and social isolation in certain individuals in whom it works as a major depressive disorder that can even lead to suicide.

Abused or Rejected by Others

Loneliness and depression are closely related. It is a sense of isolation that can develop in an individual who has been repeatedly rejected or abused by family or friends. Abuse can come from being made fun of, being abandoned by family or friends, being tortured with abusive language.



All of these come under the heading of psychological assault that can be one of the main reasons for depression and induce the individual to alienate himself from the society, thereby shutting out people who can harm him or help him.

Inability to Fit In

Certain physical disability or excessive introvert nature can promote an individual to think that he does not fit into his group or is a misfit in the rest of the crowd. Although, these individuals try to be like everyone else and mix with the crowd rather than standing out, but their inability to break the ice and cross the barrier prevents them from being part of the group.



The desire might not only be to fit in, but also to be well-liked and popular. Such conditions give rise to feelings of anxiety and depression.

Heart Break

For people who are excessively emotional and sensitive, a broken heart due to break up or divorce can have serious effects on mental health. The feeling of intense loneliness after a break up and the feelings of missing a loved one might be difficult for some people to handle.



For most people these feelings are short-lived and they cope with it effectively. But for some, the feeling can continue for years pushing them towards loneliness which can also cause mental diseases and psychiatric disorders.



Death and Divorce

Divorce or death of a spouse pushes the other one into the darkness of loneliness and [depression](#). Although, online dating is extremely popular among divorcees, but in most cases these meetings are not serious and cannot make up for the emotional trauma and depression an individual suffers due to the lack of his/her long-time companion. Sending a private message, scrolling through the feeds aimlessly and liking someone else's posts and updates make people feel miserable about themselves.

Social Media

With the advancement of social media, people have become more engrossed in virtual communities and online friendships and are becoming less interested in maintaining real life social ties with family members, friends and neighbours. But research shows that spending too much time on social networking sites can backfire and actually make people feel lonelier.

Aging

Depression is a common part of aging and reduced physical strength, mobility and diseases are sure to affect the mental health of elderly people. But with change and reform in the social structure of the modern society the value and importance of elders have become more obscure.



In traditional societies, the elders held a vital position of preserving and propagating community customs and history. But with modernization, the scenario has changed, pushing elder people into the zone of marginalized and rejected individuals both in families and neighbourhoods, making them lonely and miserable.

Negative Impact of Loneliness on Physical and Mental Health

Loneliness is hardly seen as a serious disorder, but in reality, chronic loneliness and feelings of alienation can be extremely detrimental to health. It can induce alcoholism, make a person suicidal and increase the risk of mental health disorders.

Loneliness can Affect the Brain Like Physical Pain

Loneliness is one of the major causes of mental diseases and the sense of isolation can have a similar effect on brain that is noted when an individual experiences physical pain. The sense of belonging to a group or community is important not only for companionship, but also for survival.



The brains of lonely individuals register feelings of threat and pain signals that are similar to real physical pain and danger. The level of the stress hormone cortisol shoots up abnormally high in the morning and is never at normal levels all through the day.

Increases the Risk of Dementia

Chronic loneliness can mingle with normal brain functions and increase the risk of neurodegenerative disorders like Dementia. It has been seen that those living alone or staying in nursing homes and old age institutions have greater chances of developing dementia than those staying with their families.



The feeling of loneliness raises the risk of Dementia by 64%. The opposite also holds true, that initiation of Dementia or [Alzheimer's disease](#) can also lead to social withdrawal and loneliness – one of the mental diseases symptoms.

Increased Risk of Heart Disease

The genes of chronically lonely individuals experience overexpression that leads to long-term inflammation and damage to the tissues and blood vessels of the heart increasing the [risk of heart attack](#), stroke and other cardiovascular diseases.



Inflammation is an important function of the body and short term inflammation is essential for fighting infections, but chronic inflammation for a prolonged period increases the risk of cancer and therefore, anti-inflammatory medicines can be beneficial for people who cannot come out of their shell of loneliness.

Reduce Life Expectancy

Although we ignore loneliness as just a temporary phase or transitory feeling, it can be fatal enough to cause premature death. Studies show that people who live unaccompanied are more likely to have an early death caused by stroke, heart attacks or other complications that those who live with their family or in a communal institution.



In the case of older individuals, those who reported feeling isolated, rejected or lonely had an increased chance of dying even though they were not living alone practically. The link between loneliness and health disorders persists even when we rule out signs of depression, living situation, etc.

Cause Sleeping Disorders

There is a close relation between loneliness and sleep and even minute difference in the level of loneliness has an effect on sleep. It has been seen that lonely individuals experience more trouble with sleep.



The chronic depression and anxiety prevents them from falling asleep and also makes it difficult to stay asleep leading to [sleeping disorders and insomnia](#). Loneliness hinders restful sleep and it is seen that lonely people experience broken sleep and are awakened several times during the night.

Helpful Tips to Alleviate Loneliness

Getting involved in social activities and engaging in social interactions are the best answers to the question of how to improve mental health by alleviating loneliness. Saying a friendly “hello” to your neighbours is powerful enough to bring about a big difference in your life and might even bring you out of chronic loneliness.

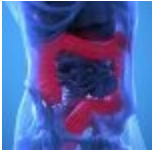
- **Understand that Loneliness is not a Fact, it is Just a Feeling** – It is important to realize what triggers the feelings of loneliness. Loneliness can be triggered by a memory because the person is actually alone and isolated from the others. Loneliness is one of the agonizing feelings that the brain associates with pain and danger and then it tries to relate the feeling to a reason. Why am I lonely? Is it because nobody loves me? Is it because I am a loser? Such theories confuse the person even further. Therefore, it is important to accept the feeling instead of over-reacting to it.
- **Reach Out to others** – It better to reach out to friends and family rather than withdrawing into yourself. Cultivating a healthy friendship helps in alleviating sadness and loneliness.
- **Form a Plan to fight Mental and Emotional Habits of Loneliness** – When dealing with emotional habits of loneliness and sadness, healthy interactions with friends on a daily basis can make things better. Therefore, plan a schedule in such a way so that you can spend quality time with friends and family and initiate wholesome conversations.
- **Focus the Concentration on the Needs and Feeling of Others** – Shifting your focus to the feelings and needs of other people and trying to help them in some way or the other can help you in forgetting about your lonely thoughts.
- **Find Like Minded People** – Now days, it is not difficult to find people who share your hobbies and interests. Get along with them to enjoy hikes, fishing trips and road trips together.
- **Make it a Point to Show up at Meetings and Gatherings** – Sticking to your commitment and showing up at a gathering or meeting provides the opportunity of meeting and communicating with new people and who knows you might strike up a friendship of a lifetime.

So, take control of your life and make it worthwhile by getting out of loneliness and if you know someone who is lonesome then try to connect with him, become his good friend, do your part to bring him back to a normal, healthy life.

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