



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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The Healthy Journey

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

The Health Risks of Loneliness

Have you felt disconnected from others lately? In the U.S., 1 in 4 people over age 65 feel socially isolated. About 28% of older adults in our country live alone. Loneliness can affect your physical and mental health. Loneliness is a risk factor for many health problems such as depression, anxiety, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, cognitive decline, dementia, and chronic pain.

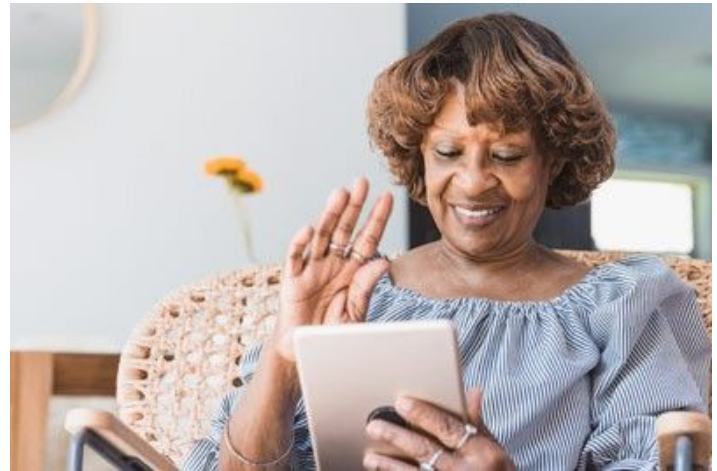
People may feel lonely when they are isolated from others. Many people felt lonely during COVID-19 when social distancing prevented people from seeing each other safely. Changes in health can lead to loneliness. For example, someone with a mobility problem may have trouble leaving the house to see others. Someone with hearing loss may have trouble connecting with others through conversation. Many adults have lost loved ones as they have grown older, and grief contributes to feelings of loneliness.

Some people feel lonely even when they are with others

People can also feel lonely when they are surrounded by others. This can happen if a person feels misunderstood or unable to relate to others. For example, it may be hard to connect or “fit in” with others who do not relate to your life stages or experiences (e.g., retirement, chronic illness).

Loneliness is painful, but does not have to be permanent. Free national resources can help.

- AARP’s Connect2Affect program features a local assistance directory. This directory helps you find free or low-cost services to prevent social isolation. To learn more, visit <https://connect2affect.org/>.
- The AARP Friendly Voice program has friendly volunteers who will call to say hello when you need someone to talk to. To request a call, contact the program at 1-888-281-0145 or visit <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/friendly-voice/>.
- Senior Planet offers free online classes including fitness, hobbies, and more. You do not need a membership to



- participate. Call 888-713-3495 or visit <https://seniorplanet.org/> for more information.
- Well Connected is a virtual community that offers free activities to adults over age 60. Activities include groups and classes you can take from home. To learn more, visit <https://covia.org/programs/well-connected/> or call (877) 797-7299.
 - The Eldercare Locator is a free national service for older Americans. This service helps people find resources to cope with isolation and loneliness in their area. Call 1-800-677-1116 or visit <https://eldercare.acl.gov/> to use this service.

Local resources are available for Baltimore residents. If you are looking for help because you feel lonely, live alone, or simply want to connect with others, try these resources:

- The free Senior Call Check Program through the Maryland Department of Aging promotes peace of mind by checking in on seniors. You receive daily text messages and a weekly call, scheduled at your convenience. After 3 unanswered calls, a friend or family member you have chosen will be contacted. Register by calling 1-866-50-CHECK or online at <https://aging.maryland.gov/Pages/senior-call-check.aspx>.
- The Baltimore City Health Department has 13 senior centers that offer fitness programs, dining, classes, and seasonal health screenings. Visit <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/>

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seniors/senior-centers or call 410-396-1337 to locate your nearest senior center.

- The Baltimore City Department of Recreation & Parks has a Senior Citizens Division that offers activities and sports for adults over age 50. The John Booth Senior Center is the division's office (2601 East Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21224; 410-396-9202).
- The Baltimore County Department of Aging has a list of senior centers in Baltimore County. Visit <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/aging/centers/index.html> or call 410-887-2594 to find your nearest senior center. Baltimore County also offers the Online Programs for Adult Learning (OPAL) Center. It is a virtual senior center that offers hybrid classes and online programs. For access to these programs, visit <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/aging/centers/opal/index.html>.

Tips to Combat Loneliness

- Try to connect with others on a daily basis. If you are unable to see someone in person, call, text, video chat, email, or mail a greeting card to stay connected.
- Talk about your feelings with a loved one, healthcare provider, mental health provider, or a trusted person.
- Practice physical activity. Exercise promotes health and boosts your mood. Try saying hello to a neighbor while you're on a walk, or see if a loved one would like to join you for a stroll.
- Practice conversation starters to reduce anxiety about meeting new people. Compliments and questions are good places to start.
- Visit your local library, senior center, or community center and become involved in the programs they offer. This is a great way to make new connections.

Heat-Related Illnesses

Heat is a leading cause of weather-related death in the United States. Heat-related illnesses include heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Many medical conditions are worsened by extreme heat. Some people are considered high-risk during heat events, such as the elderly, people with existing medical conditions, children, athletes, and people who work outside.

Signs of heat cramps are painful muscle spasms and cool/moist skin. If you notice these signs, hydrate your body with water and electrolytes.

Signs of heat exhaustion are dizziness, excessive sweating, nausea, muscle cramps, cool/clammy skin, fainting, and rapid pulse. If you notice these signs, find a cool place in the shade or air conditioning. You should drink plenty of water and use cold compresses if available.

Signs of heat stroke are headache, nausea, confusion, loss of consciousness, hot/dry skin, high fever, and the absence of sweating. If you notice someone having a heat stroke, call 911. Move the person to a cooler place, use cold compresses if available, and avoid giving the person something to drink.

Coping with Extreme Heat Events

When you check the weather report, pay attention to the heat index. The heat index is what the outside temperature actually feels like. Both humidity and outdoor temperature are used to calculate the heat index. This index is used to determine if an extreme heat event is happening. Baltimore's Health Commissioner declares a Code Red Extreme Heat Alert during extreme heat.

People living in urban areas may be at a greater risk during extreme heat events than people living in rural areas. Cities with many buildings and roads, fewer plants and trees, and high energy usage often have higher air and land surface temperatures. Scientists call this the "urban heat island" effect. Temperatures in Baltimore City can exceed temperatures in nearby counties due to this effect. There are many resources for Baltimore residents during extreme heat events.

Cooling Centers

Cooling centers are buildings with air conditioning and water. These centers are free of charge. Visit <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/health/attachments/Code%20Red%20Cooling%20Centers%20Flyer%20-%20Summer%202023%20with%20Map.pdf> for a list of cooling centers in Baltimore.

IT'S HOT
WE ARE ENTERING CODE RED
WE WANT YOU
SAFE & INSIDE
WE ARE OPENING
COOLING CENTERS

CALL 311 FOR AVAILABILITY AND LOCATIONS

OR VISIT:

BALTIMORE CITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
 @Bmore_Healthy
 Health.BaltimoreCity.gov/CodeRedInfo

Seniors can receive a ride to a cooling center through CARE's Taxi Card voucher program. This program provides a monthly transportation subsidy to Baltimore residents who are disabled or over age 60. To learn more about this program, or to apply, visit <https://www.care-taxicard.com/> or call (410)-664-1123.

Text & Email Alerts

Sign up for Baltimore City's Gov Delivery platform. Residents get updates and alerts during Code Red days. To sign up, visit <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MD-BALT/subscriber/new>.

Social Media Updates

If you use social media (e.g., Facebook or Twitter), follow the Baltimore City Health Department, The Mayor's Office, and the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (MOEM). These pages share safety tips and post updates during Code Red days.

Energy Assistance

- Apply for energy assistance through Maryland's Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP). OHEP helps low-income households avoid loss of home energy services, and also helps make energy bills more affordable. For information about these programs, or to apply, visit <https://dhs.maryland.gov/office-of-home-energy-programs/how-do-you-apply/>. You may also call 1-800-332-6347 to request a paper application, if you do not wish to apply online.
- Maryland Access Point (MAP) provides assistance to older adults, Call 410-396-CARE (2273), visit <https://>

marylandaccesspoint.211md.org/, or email map.bchd@baltimorecity.gov for information about energy assistance applications.

- Baltimore City Department of Public Works has a Senior Citizen Water Bill Assistance program. If you are eligible, you will receive a 39% discount on your water bill. For information about eligibility, visit <https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/water-billing/discount-programs>, call 311, or call 410-396-5398.
- You can also call 211, Maryland's information and referral service, if you need energy assistance.
- For more information about Code Red Extreme Heat in Baltimore, visit <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/codereinfo>.

Tips to Beat the Heat

- Drink plenty of water. Avoid dehydrating beverages such as alcohol, soda, and sugary drinks.
- Add foods with high water content to your meals. These include watermelon, cucumbers, tomatoes, apples, celery, and lettuce.
- Wear comfortable, loose, breathable, light-colored clothing.
- Take a cool shower or bath.
- Stay in an air-conditioned area. If your home does not have air conditioning, find one of Baltimore's cooling centers, or visit a local library or community center.
- Avoid sitting in a car for long periods of time. Do not leave anyone in a parked car, even if the windows are down.
- Use your stove or oven less often, as they can increase the temperature inside your home.
- Close curtains and blinds to reduce indoor temperatures.
- Spend time on the lower floors of your home or building where temperatures are cooler.
- Stay in the shade during outdoor activities. Wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a wide-brimmed hat to protect yourself from the sun.
- Stay indoors during peak sunlight hours, typically between 10am-2pm. Choose to spend time outdoors in the morning and evening, when it is cooler.



Contacting HANDLS

If you'd like to be added to the HANDLS email list, please message us at handls@mail.nih.gov.

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Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.