



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

Volume 16, Issue 2

The Healthy Journey

handls.nih.gov
877-677-9538

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

Loneliness and social isolation

Are you lonely? Have you lost friends, neighbors and family who were a part of your daily life? If you live alone, do you see or speak to someone every day? Do you sometimes feel alone or isolated? Do you have someone to turn to? In this issue we are discussing loneliness and social isolation. We rely on social connections. Without social connections we can feel heartache, experience depression and anxiety, and may affect how well we take care of ourselves. Here are some interesting facts:

- One way to reduce stress and improve your health is to be part of your community and connected to family and friends.
- People with a strong sense of belonging to a community or family are 2.6 times more likely to report good or excellent health compared with people with a low sense of belongingness.
- Social isolation can increase inflammation in the body.

- Social support from friends and family is associated with improved management of hypertension and diabetes.

10 Keys to Happier Living



When thinking about loneliness, we may be reminded of an uncomfortable feeling of heartache or sadness. Social isolation is a primary cause of loneliness. Some people choose to isolate themselves for many reasons. Choosing to isolate can be due to feeling depressed or anxious or not having close relationships with others. Sometimes people may want to be closer with family or community but struggle to do so.

At HANDLS, we want you to be informed about some of the health risks of loneliness and social isolation. Loneliness has been well studied to understand the effects on people. Scientists have learned that loneliness can create memory issues, increase risk for anxiety and depression, may increase usage of drugs and alcohol, and cause concerns related to having a long life. Here are some facts below:

- Socially isolated older adults are at higher risk of developing dementia than their peers.
- Improving social connection can protect from depression and anxiety.
- Lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death to levels comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Sample 5-for5 Connection Challenge Actions:

Visit SurgeonGeneral.gov/Challenge to find inspiration for your 5 actions. Here are a few examples:

Express Gratitude	Offer Support	Ask for or Accept Help
Call, text, or send a note — tell someone you're grateful they're in your life!	Check in with someone and let them know you're there	Let someone know you're having a hard time
Compliment someone who deserves recognition	Offer to help someone with daily tasks	Tell a loved one how they can better support you
Thank someone for a specific time they helped you	Volunteer with a local organization that's important to you	Reach out for professional mental health support, like calling 988

Contents

Loneliness and social isolation	1
Cold & flu season.....	3
Referral guide.....	3
Contacting HANDLS.....	3

Now that we have discussed some of the health risks, let's explore some ideas for improving social isolation and loneliness. Put down your phone and connect with people when you are talking with them. No one wants to compete with your phone!

- Reach out to people in your family and in your neighborhood.
- Go to neighborhood gatherings and events.
- Try helping your family, friends, and community members.
- Many community groups offer activities that you might enjoy exercise, learning a new hobby, a chance to volunteer, a chance to make a difference in your neighborhood and city. These activities may help you bring a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose.
- Tell your health care provider about changes in your life like loss of a loved one or friend that was special.
- Here are ways to become more involved in your community and improve your social connectedness.

Free national resources that 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. To get the updated catalog for Spring 2025 go to https://frontporch.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/WC_2025_Winter.pdf
- Action for Happiness is an organization dedicated to increasing happiness in the world. 10 Days of Happiness is a free online program to boost your wellbeing. You can sign up by going to <https://10daysofhappiness.org/>
- AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP is a volunteer organization for adults at least 55 years old to use their life skills and knowledge to make a change in their communities. Some



opportunities earn an hourly stipend and other benefits. To learn more, go to <https://americorps.gov/serve/amicorps-seniors/amicorps-seniors-rsvp>

Free and low-cost local resources that are available for Baltimore city and county residents.

- *The free Senior Call Check Program through the Maryland Department of Aging promotes peace of mind by checking in on seniors. You will receive daily text messages and a weekly phone call. After 3 unanswered calls, a friend or family member you have chosen will be contacted. Register by calling 1-866-50-CHECK (1-866-502-0560) or online at <https://aging.maryland.gov/Pages/senior-call-check.aspx>.



- The Baltimore City Health Department has 13 senior centers that offer fitness and wellness programs, dining, games and entertainment, classes, and seasonal health screenings. Annual membership fees vary by center, but each center is open to all Baltimore city residents. To find a senior center near you call 410-396-1337 or go to <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/seniors/senior-centers>.



- *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. Membership is free to seniors 60 years or older.

- 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.

- Baltimore County has also partnered with GetSetUp to provide the County's older adults with free classes and programs on a variety of topics including exercise, technology, and cooking. Go to <https://www.getsetup.io/partner/Baltimore> to explore free classes and use Coupon code: 'Baltimore' to make an account.
- The Baltimore City Department of Recreation & Parks has a Senior Citizens Division that offers activities and sports for adults over age 50. The Collington Square Recreation Center, located at 1410 N. Patterson Park Ave, is the Division's office and can be contacted at 410-396-9201. They provide a variety of senior classes and activities at the Cherry Hill Senior Center at the Rowing Center, located at 3301 Waterview Ave. There are also over 50 recreation centers in Baltimore that offer a variety of entertainment and activities to all residents. To find a center near you visit <https://bcrp.baltimorecity.gov/recreationcenters>.



ENOCH PRATT *free* LIBRARY
your journey starts here

- The Enoch Pratt Free Public Library is open to all Maryland residents and has multiple locations throughout Baltimore. This Library offers books, movies, downloadable content, streaming services, and tablets available to borrow for free. The library also as a variety of activities for the public. Activities include book discussions and clubs, computer literacy classes, drop-in clinics, and onsite social workers to help with social and legal services. Go to <https://www.prattlibrary.org/adults> to check out upcoming programs or to <https://www.prattlibrary.org/locations> to find a location near you.
- The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a program for older adults who want to volunteer and share their life wisdom and knowledge. Call 410-396-9406 to join.
- The Senior Companion Program (SCP) connects volunteers who are 55 and older with other seniors looking for friendship. Volunteers get a small hourly stipend and a monthly bus pass. Call 410-396-9405 to join.

- The Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) is a nationwide program but offers opportunities in Baltimore for seniors to serve as role models and mentors to young children in a variety of programs. Some examples are Head Start programs, local daycare centers, family support centers, and public elementary schools. Go to <https://springboardmd.org/behavioral-health/fgp/> or contact 410-366-1980 for more information.
- Get involved in a local church or religious institution. These institutions provide a community of like-minded people and tend to offer social assistance, events, and volunteer opportunities.

*These resources can also be found in the HANDLS The Health Journal Newsletter Volume 14, Issue 4, which can be found at <https://handls.nih.gov/news/2023-4.pdf>

Cold & flu season

This is the time of year when infections for cold and flu are most common! HANDLS would like to share some ways to prevent the spread of germs.

- Get a flu vax.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Get adequate sleep. Aim for 7 to 9 hours each night.
- Stay hydrated! Drinking fluids—especially water help flush out toxins from your immune system and keeps you healthy.

Referral guide

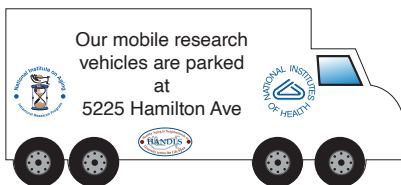
The HANDLS Referral Guide has numerous resources in Baltimore City including health care, mental health, substance abuse services, social services, vision and dental discounts and programs, pharmacy assistance and more! To access our HANDLS Referral Guide go to <https://handls.nih.gov/ReferralGuide-2023-05-26.pdf>.



Contacting HANDLS

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

HANDLS
National Institute on Aging
Biomedical Research Center
251 Bayview Blvd
Baltimore MD 21224-2816



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

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>.