

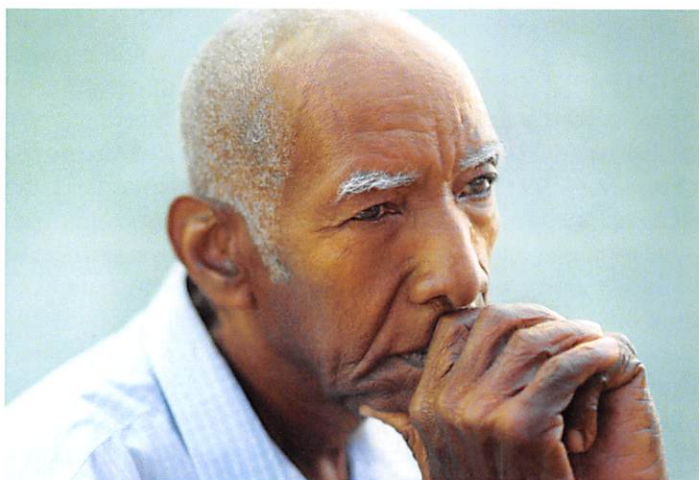
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In an age where communicating with a friend or family member on the other side of the country takes no more than a few clicks of a mouse, or a few taps on a cell phone screen, research indicates that we are, as a society, more lonely than we have ever been.

Perhaps no other age group feels the keen sting of loneliness more than the elderly.



The Elder Loneliness Epidemic

Secluded seniors

Here are some of the more recent findings regarding loneliness and aging Americans:

18 percent of seniors live alone, while 43 percent report feeling lonely on a regular basis, according to a study conducted by researchers from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF).

Lonely seniors are more likely to decline and die faster. The aforementioned UCSF study also found that people 60-years-old and older who reported feeling lonely saw a 45 percent increase in their risk for death. Isolated elders also had a 59 percent greater risk of mental and physical decline than their more social counterparts.

1 in 7 people with Alzheimer's disease live alone, according to a recently

released report from the Alzheimer's Association.

Loneliness is contagious. Older adults who feel lonely are more prone to behave in ways that may cause other people to not want to be around them. Psychologists from the University of Chicago who analyzed data from the Farmington Heart Study, a long-term, ongoing cardiovascular study, found that solitary seniors have a tendency to further isolate themselves by pushing people away and not making efforts to engage with others.

And, the biggest surprise of all?

Two-thirds of the older adults in the UCSF study who said that they were lonely were either married or living with a partner of some kind. This finding lends credence to the belief that it's not about how many relationships

you have—it's about how meaningful they are.

Even when they're being taken care of by family caregivers, Karasu says that there is often little attention paid to deep, engaging communication between a senior and the rest of the family.

She says that the modern trend of the breakdown of family relationships—like those between grandparent and grandchild—has caused many elderly people to feel as though they have been “pushed to the side,” and forgotten about.

The caregiver: a senior's link to the outside world

Here are a few ways you can help alleviate loneliness in your elderly loved one:

Listen and observe: “We often don't listen enough to the people we love,” laments Tina Tessina, Ph.D., psychotherapist and author of “The Ten Smartest Decisions a Woman Can Make After Forty.” According to Tessina, “saying ‘tell me more’ is a gift you can give from your heart.” Encouraging a senior to express themselves can help you discover what interests and passions lay dormant, just waiting to be rekindled in your loved one. “You've got to really dig deep and find out what their interests were before and get them to try and awaken those forgotten activities,” Smith says.

Develop a strategy to defeat seclusion: Once you know what your loved one loves to do, you can use this information to develop a personalized loneliness eradication plan for them. Smith cites several simple examples from her own experiences as a caregiver: While caring for an elderly couple who refused to leave their house, Smith found out that they loved to cook and garden. So, she asked what the couple's favorite meals were, cooked them and invited a few people they trusted over to the house for a dinner party. Also, because neither spouse could go outside to

garden, Smith brought the flora inside and helped them rediscover the extensive collection of gardening manuals that they had forgotten about. While caring for an angry 91-year-old man who was reluctant to communicate, Smith discovered that he had a passion for singing and photography. Walking down the hall with him one day, she began to belt out a few bars of “Let Me Call You Sweetheart.” The man responded by singing right along with her and grudgingly admitting, “You're OK.” Today, he sings for the community and is part of a club of retired photographers that Smith helped him contact.

Let them teach you: Smith encourages caregivers to connect with their loved ones by allowing them to pass a portion of their vast store of hard-earned knowledge on to you. “I learn something new every day because I am being taught by the best,” she says. The key is to let the senior's passions guide the lesson plan. For example, if you're caring for your mother who loves to embroider, ask her to teach you how to do it. This not only has the potential to be a great bonding experience, it also can help add a bit of balance to the child-parent dynamic that may have been upended when you started caring for her.

Bridge the generation gap: According to Smith, caregivers can play a vital role in fostering a relationship between a senior and their youngest relatives. Too often, she says that grandkids see their grandparents as either crazy or boring, when they should be viewing their elders as sources of wisdom. Try to come up with ways to help the oldest and the youngest generations of your family to spend time together. “That's an absence in so many elderly homes. They need to share stories. There's a wealth of knowledge that can be passed on to the younger generation,” Smith says. Karasu also points out that seniors have the potential to contribute a lot to their families—if they are allowed to

remain engaged. He says this is doubly important in light of the fact that research has shown that an unengaged elderly adult will experience cognitive decline at a much faster rate than a senior who is mentally stimulated by interactions with other people.

It's the thought that counts:

Another piece of advice from the pros: urge other family members to reach out to an elderly loved one. It doesn't have to be a grand, time-consuming gesture. Something as simple as sending a card, dropping off a little present of their favorite food, or calling for 30 minutes

a couple of times a week can go a long way to making a senior feel loved and connected to the rest of the family.

Taking steps to make your elderly loved one less lonely could not only help them live longer, Smith says that, based on her personal experiences, it may make their eventual passing a bit easier. "When the elderly get re-acquainted with family members, it makes dying a bit easier for them," she says.

*by ANNE-MARIE BOTEK retrieved from:
<https://www.agingcare.com/articles/loneliness-in-the-elderly-151549.htm>*



Tips for Picking Healthy Food as You Get Older

Here are 6 tips to help you find the best foods for your body and your budget.

1. Know what a healthy plate looks like

You might remember the food pyramid, but the USDA recently unveiled a simpler way to help people see what they should eat each day. It's called MyPlate. The simple graphic shows exactly how the five food groups should stack up on your plate. These are the building blocks for a healthy diet.

2. Look for important nutrients

Make sure you eat a variety of foods

to get all the nutrients you need. Your plate should look like a rainbow—bright, colored foods are always the best choice! A healthy meal should include:

- Lean protein (lean meats, seafood, eggs, beans)
- Fruits and vegetables (think orange, red, green, and purple)
- Whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat pasta)
- Low-fat dairy (milk and its alternatives)

Remember to choose foods that are high in fiber and low in sodium or salt. Also, look for Vitamin D, an important mineral as we age.

3. Read the Nutrition Facts label

The healthiest foods are whole foods. These are often found on the perimeter of the grocery store in the produce, meat, and dairy sections.

When you do eat packaged foods, be a smart shopper! Read the labels to find items that are lower in fat, added sugars, and sodium.

4. Use recommended servings

To maintain your weight, you must eat the right amount of food for your age and body. The American Heart Association provides recommended daily servings for adults aged 60+.

5. Stay hydrated

Water is an important nutrient too! Don't let yourself get dehydrated—drink small amounts of fluids consistently throughout the day. Tea, coffee, and water are your best choices. Keep fluids with sugar and salt at a mini-

mum, unless your doctor has suggested otherwise.

6. Stretch your food budget

Want to get the biggest nutritional bang for your buck? The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can help you afford healthy food when you need it. Over 4 million older Americans use SNAP to buy food, and the average senior receives \$113 each month. Visit [BenefitsCheckUp.org/getSNAP](https://www.benefitscheckup.org/getSNAP) to see if the program can help you.

Retrieved from <https://www.ncoa.org/economic-security/benefits/food-and-nutrition/senior-nutrition>



Essential Tips for Aging Well and Happily

After searching through dozens of aging articles and studies, we've found the top five essential tips for aging happily and staying healthy.

Be Socially Engaged

Maintaining active connections with our community, family and friends is

critical to staying healthy, both mentally and physically. As we ourselves get older, our family relationships change and we have opportunities to mend fences — particularly with our own aging parents. In addition, aging adults are in the unique position of being able to learn a lot from older

and younger friends — the former providing a sense of perspective, and the latter a sense of youth. Meanwhile, social isolation is a major predictor of depression, as well as having negative health effects: the Louisiana Healthy Aging Study reported earlier this year that more social engagement has a significant effect on physical health later in life.

Have a Plan for Your Later Years

On Psychology Today's website, aging expert Helen Kivnick, Ph.D., a psychologist at the University of Minnesota, points out that our ever-increasing life expectancy presents an amazing opportunity for personal growth: "Because people live longer and with greater independence, they can plan their futures more actively," she says. Of course, that means we can't just sit around waiting to get old and watching our bodies and minds deteriorate. We have to think about what we might want to do, whether it's spending more time in the garden or learning a new creative skill. "[T]he most important thing we can do to ensure a comfortable and interesting old age is to plan for one."

Rethink the Idea of Older Age

Several aging experts are starting to lay some of the blame for our ambivalence about getting older on the pervasive effects of ageism in our society. Learning to accept the natural changes to our bodies and minds that occur as we age is a big part of combating the problem. Whether it's the media or pharmaceutical companies, we are bombarded with messages about how we're going to start falling apart, our bodies losing vitality and our minds losing acuity, and this makes the prospect of getting older somewhat depressing; but with aging as with anything else, there is such a thing as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we look at getting older as an opportunity — a chance to really focus on

what is important to us — we can look forward to actually becoming healthier and happier with age.

Stay Physically Active

We've all heard the saying: use it or lose it. If you want to remain healthy and vital well into your later years, exercise is a must. Regular physical exercise will help you maintain flexibility and muscle mass, sure, but it can also keep you feeling young. It's mentally empowering to be able to continue doing many of the physical activities you did when you were younger — some people, in fact, are more fit as older adults than they were as young adults. But perhaps the most compelling evidence of all for staying active comes from a study in the Archives of Internal Medicine: those who were more physically fit in midlife were less likely to develop chronic health conditions in old age, such as Alzheimer's disease or congestive heart failure.

Watch Your Stress Levels

Relax! Slow down! It's advice we're all used to in our increasingly hectic daily lives, but stress is a bit more complex than that. On the one hand, debilitating stress can have negative effects on our health later in life: a study in the Journal of Gerontology found that adults who reported greater work stress in midlife were more likely to show disabilities and physical difficulties in older age. Oddly enough, though, a little stress can be good for us. "If you never have to react to anything demanding, the mechanisms in your brain that help you deal with taxing situations will atrophy," says Luigi Ferrucci, MD, PhD, scientific director of the National Institute on Aging, in an article on Oprah.com. Striking the right balance for each individual is the key.

Retrieved from <https://www.aplaceformom.com/blog/2013-6-24-tips-for-aging-well/>



Older drivers: Tips for driver safety

Driver safety requires more than understanding road signs and traffic laws. As you get older, you'll likely notice physical changes that can make certain actions — such as turning your head to look for oncoming traffic or braking safely — more challenging. Still, older drivers can remain safe on the road. Consider seven tips for older drivers.

Stay physically active

Staying physically active improves your strength and flexibility. In turn, physical activity can improve driver safety by making it easier to turn the steering wheel, look over your shoulder, and make other movements while driving and parking.

Look for ways to include physical activity in your daily routine. Walking is a great choice for many people. Stretching and strength training exercises are helpful for older drivers, too. If you've been sedentary, get your doctor's OK before increasing your activity level.

Schedule regular vision and hearing tests

Some senses, such as hearing and vision, tend to decline with age. Impaired hearing can be a concern for

older drivers by limiting the ability to hear an approaching emergency vehicle or train. Common age-related vision problems — such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration — also can make it difficult to see clearly or drive at night.

Ask your doctor how often to schedule vision and hearing tests. Even if you think your hearing and vision are fine, stick to your doctor's recommended exam schedule. Problems might be easier to correct if caught early, and specialists can recommend timely adjustments to reduce your risk of an accident.

For example, an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) might recommend driving only during daylight hours.

Manage any chronic conditions

Work with your doctor to manage any chronic conditions — especially those that might impact driver safety, such as diabetes or seizures. Follow your doctor's instructions for managing your condition and staying safe behind the wheel. This might include adjusting your treatment plan or restricting your driving.

It's equally important to know your medications. Many drugs, including

pain medications, sleep medications, antihistamines and muscle relaxants, can affect driver safety, even when you're feeling fine. Read your medication labels so that you know what to expect from each one.

Don't drive if you've taken medication that causes drowsiness or dizziness. If you're concerned about side effects or the impact on driver safety, consult your doctor or pharmacist.

Understand your limitations

Consider your physical limitations and make any necessary adjustments. For example, if your hands hurt when gripping the steering wheel, use a steering wheel cover that makes holding and turning the wheel more comfortable.

You might ask your doctor for a referral to an occupational therapist, who can offer assistive devices to help you drive or suggest exercises to help you overcome your limitations.

You might also adjust your vehicle or choose a different vehicle to better meet your needs. For example, vehicles that feature larger, easier-to-read dials on the dashboard are often popular with older drivers.

In addition, some newer models offer safety features that can help you avoid collisions, change lanes safely, manage your blind spot, and more.

Drive when the roads — and you — are in good condition

You can improve driver safety by driving during the daytime, in good weather, on quiet roads and in familiar areas. If visibility is poor, consider delaying your trip or using public transportation.

Beyond road conditions, make sure you're in optimal condition to drive. Don't drive if you're tired or angry.

Never drive after drinking alcohol or using other mind-altering substances. This includes marijuana — even if it's been prescribed to you for medical use.

Stash your cellphone and focus on the road

Driving while distracted is a frequent cause of accidents. Take steps before you go to ensure your ability to focus.

When you get in your vehicle, be prepared. Plan your route ahead of time so that you don't need to read a map or directions while driving. If you use a GPS device, enter your destination before you start driving. If necessary, call ahead for directions.

While you're driving, don't do anything that takes your focus from the road — even eating or adjusting the radio.

Make a pledge to never use or even look at your cellphone while driving: no talking, texting or posting of any kind.

The National Safety Council also advises against any type of phone conversation or voice-to-text features while driving, including hands-free and Bluetooth devices.

Update your driving skills

Consider taking a refresher course for older drivers. Updating your driving skills might even earn you a discount on your car insurance, depending on your policy. Look for courses through a community education program or local organizations that serve older adults.

If you become confused while you're driving or you're concerned about your ability to drive safely — or others have expressed concern — it might be best to stop driving. Consider taking the bus, using a van service, hiring a driver or taking advantage of other local transportation options. Giving up your car keys doesn't need to end your independence. Instead, consider it a way to keep yourself and others safe on the road.

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