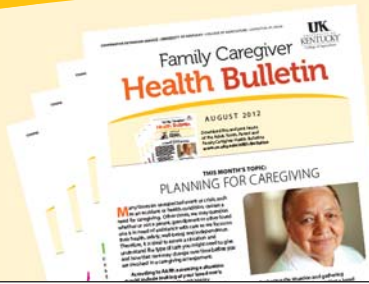


# Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



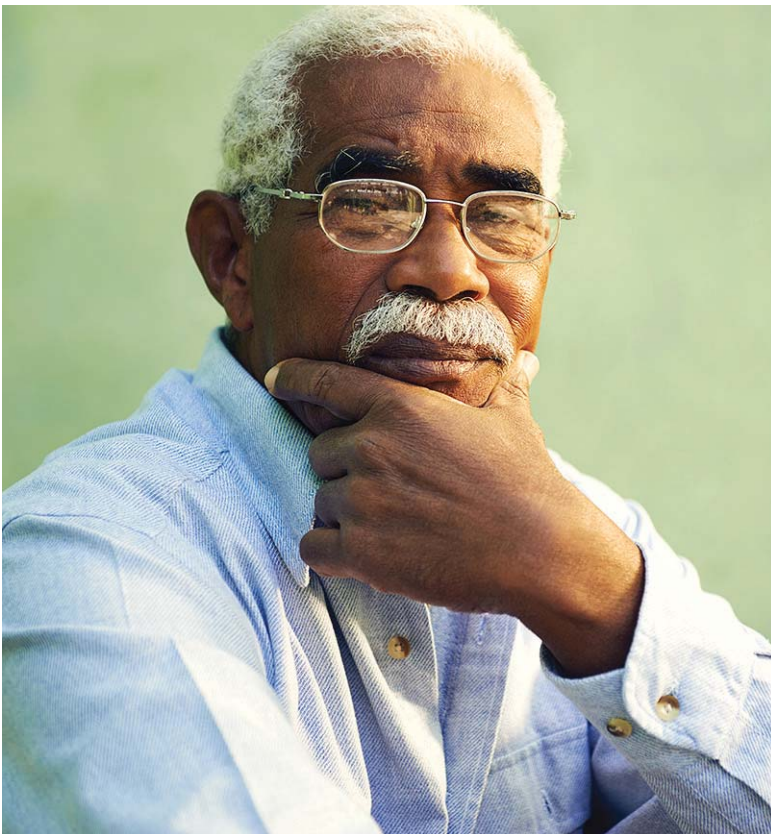
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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# THE DANGERS OF LONELINESS



**F**or many, loneliness includes feeling empty or unwanted or in a state of separation or solitude. Loneliness is a complicated human emotion or state of mind that is unique to each person. It has no common cause. People who are lonely often crave human contact, but their state of mind makes it a challenge to pursue meaningful activity or to connect with others. As a result, loneliness is a serious health risk, similar to smoking and obesity. People who are lonely are often socially isolated and at greater risk for illness and disease, including arthritis, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Loneliness is linked to depression, memory problems, poor decision-making, and alcohol and drug abuse. Loneliness can even lead to an early death. Yet society does not talk enough about loneliness being a health problem, leaving people feeling embarrassed and ashamed of their feelings and their situation.

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# *Loneliness is treated by the quality of human interaction that one experiences versus the quantity.*

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Caregivers are at greater risk of loneliness due to the many choices and/or personal sacrifices they must make on a daily basis as a result of the caregiving process. Such sacrifices might include cutting leisure activities and quality time with friends and family, including the care recipient. Recognizing that you are lonely and seeking assistance can help improve caregiver life quality and as a result, improve the caregiving relationship.

Older adults are also at greater risk of loneliness, most often due to shrinking numbers of social relationships and social events and a lack of or perceived lack of social support. Frailer older adults also become increasingly less resistant to physical, mental and social challenges, leaving them even more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness, depression, stress and ill health.

*Quality relationships are necessary for emotional fulfillment, behavioral adjustment and mental function.*

According to John Cacioppo, a leading researcher on loneliness from the University of Chicago, a few ways that loneliness can be overcome include:

- Recognizing that you feel lonely and need to change things
- Understanding the physical and mental effects of loneliness
- Seeking meaningful activities, such as community service, hobbies and social interactions
- Focusing on quality relationships with people who share similar values, attitudes and interests
- Maintaining a positive attitude and life outlook

As a caregiver experiencing loneliness, these may be examples for you to keep in mind. As a caregiver to someone who is feeling lonely and isolated, you may need to apply these tips to help the person for whom you provide care seek and maintain meaningful connections.



It is important to remember that loneliness is not treated by having 1,000 social media contacts or by engaging with large groups of people. Instead, it is the quality of human interaction that one experiences versus the quantity. A quality relationship is often one that is reciprocal — in which each person can count on the other. Quality relationships and a sense of meaningful connection are necessary for emotional fulfillment, behavioral adjustment and mental function.

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Family Caregiver  
**Health Bulletin**

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