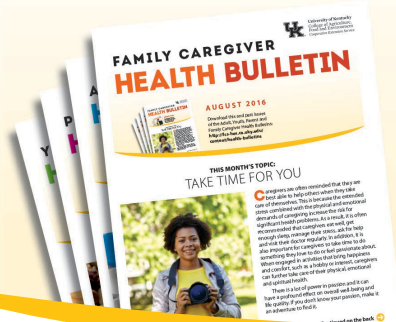


# FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



**NOVEMBER 2017**

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: SOCIAL ISOLATION IS DANGEROUS



**J**ust as people need food and water to survive, people also need meaningful social relationships and connections. Because people are wired for social contact, without it, the risk for jeopardizing overall health, well-being and life quality increases. While it is okay to feel lonely and be alone at times, chronic loneliness can cause serious physical, emotional and mental health concerns.

### Loneliness, if not addressed, can lead to:

- social isolation
- physical and mental decline
- depression
- poor sleeping patterns
- disrupted immune system
- poor nutrition
- high blood pressure
- decreased learning, memory and motivation

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# According to a 2013 AARP study, the percentage of adults who say they are lonely has doubled since the 1980s.

## ➔ Continued from page 1

Loneliness is not uncommon with caregivers. Some caregivers become isolated because they are forced or choose to withdraw from previous activities or lifestyles due to the time demands of caregiving. Some become isolated because family and friends seemed to disappear as a means of keeping their distance. Others feel lonely due to limited communication and/or interaction with their loved ones because of a disease or illness. Caregivers also are at risk of feeling lonely when they set aside their own needs and lifestyle to focus on their loved one. As a result, caregiving can be a dark place. The Family Caregiver Alliance reveals that between 40 and 70 percent of family caregivers experience symptoms of depression.

### Symptoms of chronic loneliness include feeling:

- discomfort and distress
- sad, empty, isolated
- distanced from others
- deprived
- longing

In addition, people fighting loneliness are more susceptible to emotional eating and weight gain. Increased blood pressure caused by stress can lead to additional health problems, including diabetes, stroke and premature death. Children and teens are more likely to adapt an outcast status, have problems in or drop out of school or even become delinquent. Adults who are lonely are at greater risk of alcoholism and depression. Those living alone are at greater risk of suicide. Loneliness is particularly prevalent among older adults. As we age, our social circle shrinks, which makes it more difficult to have meaningful interactions with others. According to a 2013 AARP study, the percentage of adults who say they are lonely has doubled since the 1980s from 20 to 40 percent.

If you are experiencing loneliness, you are not alone. You don't have to be alone as there are many ways to increase your social interaction and strategies for staying well:



- Take time for you. Build “me” time into your daily routine — even if it is just for 10 minutes.
- Reconnect with friends and family.
- Ask for help.
- Take breaks and call upon respite either through family or friends or more formal services that you can find by calling your local area agency on aging.
- Maintain your sense of self; this might include exercise, reading, going to dinner or finding a cause or hobby for which you are passionate.

Caregiving is a journey that can be difficult to navigate, but with support and a mindset to take care of yourself, caregiving can be a rewarding experience.

### REFERENCES:

- Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA). (2012). Caregiver isolation and loneliness. Retrieved September 25, 2017 from <https://www.caregiver.org/caregiver-isolation-and-loneliness>
- Marano, H. E., (2003). The dangers of loneliness. Psychology Today. Retrieved July 25, 2017 from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200307/the-dangers-loneliness>

**FAMILY CAREGIVER  
HEALTH BULLETIN**

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