

Tips for Seniors to Stay Connected

With limited relationships and social support, individuals can find it hard to cope and deal with stress.² Studies have shown that being socially disconnected can lead to feelings of isolation, which may then lead to a higher number of depression and anxiety symptoms.²

The mental health landscape for seniors looked different prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. How has the mental wellness of older adults been affected because of COVID-19? Obviously, quarantine measures were put in place to reduce the spread of the virus. However, the number of socially isolated older adults in the long-term care community and nursing homes has drastically increased. Reasons include:

- Regular visits from family and friends have been interrupted.³
- Before the pandemic, many seniors regularly participated in social activities, including senior centre, family, and church visits, traveling, and other social events.³
- Many community services that support seniors have also been stopped, including adult-day care. This can worsen the stress, anxiety and depression in caregivers.³
- Even before the pandemic, social isolation in seniors was a public health crisis. With many closings and restrictions in place, many seniors have been cut off from resources. However, few alternatives were made available for seniors.⁴

Did you know?

The National Seniors Council Report of 2017¹ tells us that:

16% of seniors felt isolated from others often or some of the time.

6% of seniors reported spending little or no time with someone with whom they could complete enjoyable activities.

About two out of ten Canadian seniors reported having someone to receive advice about a crisis only none or little of the time.

17.3% reported feeling excluded often or some of the time.

While similar statistics have not been collected for COVID-19 yet, the **numbers are expected to increase.**

Social isolation can be **equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day** in terms of health consequences.⁹

What to Do

Technology plays a big role in maintaining social connections, but it's not for everyone. Community-based programs like dementia-friendly libraries are an example of the innovative work happening across the country. Here are other ideas for older adults to avoid social isolation and loneliness, both on and offline:



Video chat via Skype, Facetime, Zoom, and Google Duo.



Phone call with a student studying healthcare. Ask a member of your healthcare team to enroll you with the [Student-Senior Isolation Prevention Partnership](http://www.ssipp.info).

www.ssipp.info



Exercise. Go for a walk. Try chair yoga. YouTube (free) offers great workout videos for older adults.



Find a podcast about a subject that interests you.



Check out [Stay in Touch](http://www.stayintouchinitiative.com), a website where volunteers submit music, photography and other creative pursuits for seniors to enjoy.

www.stayintouchinitiative.com



Take a [free virtual tour](#) of a museum, zoo or aquarium.

Seniors experience the highest degree of loneliness and social exclusion of any age group. Canada needs to confront its current epidemic of loneliness head-on. Investments need to be made. CanAge addresses this issue and makes recommendations in its **[VOICES of Canada's Seniors: A Roadmap to an Age-Inclusive Canada](#)**.



www.CanAge.ca/voices

References

1. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2018001/article/54977-eng.htm>
2. Frank, D. The danger of social isolation. AARP (2018) <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2018/social-isolation-symptoms-danger.html>
3. Santini, Z. I. et al. Social disconnectedness, perceived isolation, and symptoms of depression and anxiety among older Americans (NSHAP): a longitudinal mediation analysis. *The Lancet* 5, e62-70 (2020).
4. Wu, B. Social isolation and loneliness among older adults in the context of COVID-19: a global challenge. *Global Health Research and Policy* 5, 27 (2020).



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