

# Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: What Older Adults, Families and Care Partners Should Know



**CCSMH**  
Canadian Coalition for  
Seniors' Mental Health

Older adults may face feelings of social isolation or loneliness that can have an impact on their mental or physical health. However, this isn't an inevitable part of aging. Here are some of the facts regarding the risks – and ways to mitigate them.

## Social Isolation & Loneliness: Similar but Different Concepts

- Social isolation can be understood as a measurable lack in the number of relationships a person has.
- Loneliness is more subjective and can be understood as the feeling we get when our social relationships are lacking in terms of quality or quantity compared with what we expect them to be.

## Social Isolation and Loneliness Can Impact our Physical and Mental Health

As many as 41% of Canadians aged 50 years and older are at risk of social isolation. Up to 58% have experienced loneliness.

Health risks of isolation and loneliness among adults over 50 include:

- 32% increased risk of stroke
- 25% increased risk of cancer mortality
- 50% increased risk of developing dementia
- 45% increased risk of death

*Data from the National Institute on Ageing.*

## Staying Connected is Good for Our Health

Staying socially connected may mitigate these risks and contribute to better physical and mental health. From a national survey we conducted, older adults identified these activities as their preferred ways to address feeling socially isolated or lonely:

- spending time with friends or family
- exercising
- spending time in nature
- participating in hobbies
- volunteering



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