

5 SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT LONELINESS

Humans are social creatures. Whether we're catching up with friends and family or chatting up a casual acquaintance, we are hardwired to connect with other people . . . which is why loneliness feels so awful. That feeling isn't just in your head — evidence shows loneliness is extremely bad for our health. Fortunately, the more you understand it, the more you can do to combat its effects. Here are five things you need to know.

1. LONELINESS IS BAD FOR YOUR MIND AND YOUR BODY.

Of course, feeling lonely can make your mental health worse. But loneliness puts so much stress on the body, it can have a massive impact on your physical health, too. Studies show that chronic loneliness can be as harmful to your body as smoking and alcoholism, and twice as harmful as obesity.¹

CHRONIC LONELINESS
CAN IMPACT YOUR HEALTH

2. YOU CAN BE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE AND STILL BE LONELY.

Loneliness can come from isolation, like if you can't leave your home due to a long-term illness. It can be brought on by big life changes, like moving to a new town, switching jobs, or experiencing a death in the family. But it can also be perceived — you can be surrounded by people at work or home and still experience loneliness because you don't feel understood, cared for, or seen.

3. CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES MAKE US EXTRA VULNERABLE.

The causes of loneliness can vary based on our age, race, gender, and life stage. Young adults can struggle to make friends after graduation, while older adults may struggle to connect after retirement. For men, expectations that they bottle their emotions often lead to loneliness when friendships remain only surface level. Meanwhile, the often-lonely work of caregiving falls heavily on women, whether it's new motherhood, looking after an aging parent, or being the only source of comfort for a lonely spouse. (Interestingly, men and women often experience loneliness differently. Where many men feel anger and irritability, women often experience sadness and depression.)

4. SOCIAL MEDIA CAN MAKE LONELINESS WORSE — AND EVEN DANGEROUS.

A little social media can keep us connected. But a lot of social media can put us at risk. When we view other people's filtered highlight reels of fun and excitement, it can make us feel like we're missing out. Even worse, some groups intentionally target lonely people on social media. By drawing in vulnerable folks online who are looking for a place to belong, these bad actors can make conspiracy theories go mainstream, spread dangerous misinformation,² and even sway unsuspecting readers towards extremist viewpoints.³

5. FEELING LONELY? YOU'RE IN GOOD COMPANY.

A 2021 study showed that one in every three Americans reported serious loneliness, with respondents saying they felt lonely "frequently" or "almost all the time"⁴ It's important to remember: Feeling lonely is not a sign of a weakness, and it doesn't mean you're strange or different. Rather, loneliness is a signal, just like hunger or thirst, that your body is ready for you to do something to make it feel better.

1 IN 3 U.S. ADULTS
IS SERIOUSLY LONELY

IT'S OKAY TO NOT FEEL OKAY. YOUR STATE OF IOWA BENEFITS CAN HELP.

If you're struggling with loneliness or other mental health concerns, your State of Iowa health plan from Wellmark® Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® can help you access the care and support you need. Visit [Wellmark.com/Finder](https://www.wellmark.com/finder) to search for in-network mental health providers, or use Doctor On Demand® to schedule a virtual visit.

1. [apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation)

2. en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism_fake_news_disinformation_print_friendly_0_0.pdf

3. ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250171.pdf

4. mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/loneliness-in-america

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