

TIPS TO TACKLE **LONELINESS**

Loneliness doesn't just feel awful — it actually IS awful for our mental and physical health. If you're feeling out-of-touch with how to connect with others, or if you just want to get healthier and grow your social circle, consider these five tips.



Be intentional about scheduling time with people you enjoy.

If you have friends or family you like spending time with, put regular meet-ups on the calendar. Life is hectic for everyone, and if you wait until the last minute to reach out, your schedules may never coordinate.



Find purpose and community in intense short-term projects.

A great way to achieve a sense of belonging is working shoulder-to-shoulder with others towards a common goal with a defined end-date. This could include participating in a community building project, joining a sports league, working onstage or backstage for a community theater production, or giving your time to a cause or candidate you support. The activity itself helps you meet like-minded people, and the short time frame creates urgency, which builds closeness and camaraderie.



Volunteer.

You can also discover purpose in long-term service and volunteer work. Many people find volunteering — particularly volunteering with organizations that serve people less fortunate than themselves — to be very fulfilling, giving them new perspectives and a renewed appreciation for the world around them.



Look to your faith community.

Fellowship is an important component in almost all houses of worship. If religious faith or spirituality is important to you personally, consider upping your in-person participation, whether that's through volunteering during services or attending regular classes.



Be the person you need for someone else.

If you're feeling lonely, there's a very good chance someone around you is too. So rather than waiting for someone else to come to the rescue, be brave and reach out yourself. Message that old high school buddy you heard was going through a tough time. Invite the new team member at work to join you for some lunch and laughs. Send a thank you note to a teacher who made a difference in your life. While you may not see the impact right away, by taking the first step, you'll be alleviating someone else's loneliness. The eventual rewards will far outweigh any awkwardness you may feel.

SIGNS OF LONELINESS

Many people are embarrassed to admit they are lonely, so they hide it — even from themselves. Be on the lookout for these symptoms and feelings in yourself and others:

- Feeling unable to connect with others on a deeper level
- Not having a best friend or core friend group
- Feeling isolated, even around other people
- Feeling self-doubt/low self-worth
- Assuming the worst in every situation, or overreacting to minor issues
- Exhaustion or burnout
- Frequent colds and other minor illnesses due to a weakened immune system
- Spending excessive time on social media
- Valuing possessions over people
- Irritability, anger, sadness, and other symptoms of depression or anxiety

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.