



The health impacts of loneliness

Taken from the publication, “Safeguarding the Convoy – a call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness”.

Loneliness is bad for your health. Researchers rate loneliness as a higher risk than lifelong smoking. Researchers also link lack of social interaction with the onset of degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s: an illness which costs us an estimated £20 billion a year and has an even higher human cost. One study reported a doubled risk of Alzheimer’s disease in lonely people compared with those who were not lonely.

It has been shown that loneliness makes it harder to regulate behaviour, rendering people more likely to drink excessively, have unhealthier diets or take less exercise. There is also evidence that loneliness adversely affects the immune and cardio-vascular systems.

Loneliness is closely associated with depression, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified as the foremost disability. Rates of depression rise with age, from 25% of older people living in community to 40% at age 85 and beyond.

Unsurprisingly such problems increase with distance from home. 40% of older people consulted their GP about a mental health problem; this rate climbed to 50% for those in hospital, and 60% for those in care homes. A meta-analysis found that diagnosis of depression for those aged over 65 increased the mortality rate by 70%.

Loneliness and poor physical health also interact. In some cases a health condition may trigger greater isolation and loneliness. For example, hearing impairment has been found to

increase loneliness. And this situation is likely further to erode personal resilience. Decreasing mobility, and aches and pains which become routine, also inhibit people in keeping up with their family and friends.

Loneliness increases with greater limitation in people's ability to undertake activities of daily living. Indeed physical limitation is the largest single predictor of loneliness.

It is vital that health professionals are alert to the two way links between poor health and loneliness and are able to make connections in diagnosis and treatment. Loneliness also impacts the way that older people interact with and ask for help from those providing health services in the UK. Recently the impact of loneliness on the health service itself was highlighted in the Lancet as an "an epidemic of loneliness" by Dr [Ishani Kar-Purkayastha](#) MRCP (The Lancet, [Volume 376, Issue 9758](#))

For more information about the impacts of loneliness and what everyone can do about it, read the full publication, "Safeguarding the Convoy – a call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness". Find this publication on our website www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

