

Loneliness in Older Adults

Haywards Heath & District Probus Club



Loneliness in older people

Older people are especially vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation – and it can have a serious effect on health. But there are ways to overcome loneliness, even if you live alone and find it hard to get out.

Hundreds of thousands of older adults, especially those over the age of 75, feel lonely and cut off from society. According to Age UK, more than two million people in England over the age of 75 live alone, and more than a million of them say they go for over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member. The **Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness** estimates that eight million men (of all ages) in the UK feel lonely at least once a week, with nearly three million reporting that it is a daily occurrence. One in ten men said they would not admit to feeling lonely.

People can become socially isolated for various reasons, such as getting older or weaker, no longer being the hub of their family, leaving the workplace, the deaths of spouses and friends, or through disability or illness. Whatever the cause, it's shockingly easy to be left feeling alone and vulnerable, which can lead to **depression** and a serious decline in physical health and wellbeing.



Picture Credit/Attribution: File:The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved.JPG. The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved. Burim, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

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Someone who is lonely probably also finds it hard to reach out. There's a stigma surrounding loneliness, and older people tend not to ask for help because they have too much pride. It's important to remember loneliness can and does affect anyone and at any age.

Ways that older people can connect with others

The NHS, [HERE](#), suggest several ways that older people can connect with others and start to feel useful and be appreciated again:

Advice about Coronavirus advice and your Mental Wellbeing

Get advice about coronavirus and looking after your mental wellbeing:

- [Every Mind Matters: how to look after your mental wellbeing while staying at home](#)
- [Mind: Coronavirus and your wellbeing](#)

Smile, even if it feels hard

Grab every chance to smile at others or begin a conversation – for instance, with the cashier at the shop or the person next to you in the GP waiting room. If you're shy or not sure what to say, try asking people about themselves.

Invite friends for tea

If you're feeling down and alone, it's tempting to think nobody wants to visit you. But often friends, family and neighbours will appreciate receiving an invitation to come and spend some time with you. If you'd prefer for someone else to host, in that case, a charity called [Re-engage](#) holds regular free Sunday afternoon tea parties for people over the age of 75 who live alone. You'll be collected from your home and driven to a volunteer host's home for the afternoon. You can [apply online](#) or call Re-engage on 0800 716 543.

Keep in touch by phone

Having a chat with a friend or relative over the phone can be the next best thing to being with them. Or you can call [The Silver Line](#), a helpline for older people set up by Esther Rantzen on 0800 4 70 80 90.

You can also call [Independent Age](#) on 0800 319 6789, [Age UK](#) on 0800 055 6112, or [Friends of the Elderly](#) on 0300 332 1110 to receive a weekly or fortnightly friendship call from a volunteer who enjoys talking to older people.

Learn to love computers



Picture Credit: "New-fangled Tablet Computer" by jitze is licensed under CC BY 2.0

If your friends and family live far away, an excellent way to stay in touch, especially with grandchildren, is by using a personal computer or tablet (a handheld computer). You can share emails and photos with family and friends, have free video chats using services such as [Skype](#), [FaceTime](#) or [Viber](#), and make new online "friends" or reconnect with old friends on social media sites such as [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) and website forums (online 'meeting' places).

A tablet computer can be handy if mobility is difficult and you can't get around very easily, as you can sit with it on your knee or close to hand and the screen is clear and bright. A sponge-tip stylus pen or speech recognition may help if the touchscreen is difficult for arthritic hands or fingers with poor circulation.

Libraries and community centres often hold regular training courses for older people to learn basic computer skills and be an ideal place to meet and spend time with others in their own right.

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Local branches of Age UK run classes in computing to help older people get to grips with smartphones, tablet computers and email. Get some tips and advice on becoming more confident using the internet [HERE](#), including how to access your GP surgery online and how to look for reliable online health information.

Get involved in local community activities

These will vary according to where you live. The chances are you'll have access:

- to a singing or walking group, book clubs, bridge, bingo, quiz nights and faith groups
- local branches of regional and national organisations that hold social events, such as:
 - ✓ **Women's Institute**
 - ✓ **Rotary**
 - ✓ **Contact the Elderly**
 - ✓ **Brendoncare clubs** in the south of England
 - ✓ **The local Probus Club** (usually there are separate Clubs for men and women).
 - ✓ **The Silver Line helpline** (0800 4 70 80 90) can tell you what's happening in your local area.



Fill your diary

It can help you feel less lonely if you plan the week ahead and put things in your diary to look forward to each day, such as a walk in the park or going to a local coffee shop, library, sports centre, cinema or museum. There's a free guide available [HERE](#) from Independentage.org with advice on simple things to try which could help reduce loneliness and information on where to look for more help. You can order a free print copy instead of downloading the file online by calling 0800 319 6789 or email advice@independentage.org.

Get out and about

Don't wait for people to come and see you – travel to visit them. One advantage of being older is that public transport is better value. Local bus travel is free for older people across England. The age at which you can apply for your free bus pass depends on when you were born and where you live:

- Contact your local authority for more information on how to apply.
- Use this [State Pension calculator](#) to determine the exact date when you can get your free bus pass.
- Train and coach travel can be cheap for longer distances, especially if you book in advance online and use a [Senior Railcard](#).
- The [Royal Voluntary Service](#) can put you in touch with volunteers who provide free transport for older people with mobility issues or who live in rural areas with limited public transport.

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Help others

Why not use the knowledge and experience you have gained over a lifetime to give something back to your community? You'll get lots back in return, such as new skills and confidence – and, hopefully, some new friends, too. There are endless volunteering opportunities that relish the qualities and skills of older people, such as patience, experience and calmness:

- Examples are [Home-Start](#), [Sure Start](#), helping in a local charity shop or hospital, [Citizens Advice](#), and school reading programmes.
- Find out how to volunteer in your area on the [NCVO website](#).

The University of the Third Age

The University of the Third Age (U3A) operates in many areas, offering older people the chance to learn or do something new. Run by volunteers, U3A has no exams. Instead, it gives you the opportunity to do, play or learn something you may never have done before - or something you haven't considered since your school days. U3A is also a great place to meet people and make new friends. Find your nearest U3A [HERE](#).



Activities that appeal to older men

Practical activities such as gardening or DIY appeal to older men. Most activities that generate a sense of purpose, such as teaching skills to others (ICT training) or helping out in a charity shop, has also successfully encouraged participation.

Men in Sheds, which offers a space where men can feel comfortable and at ease, share skills, socialise and carry out activities that benefit the local community, is a popular activity amongst older men. By November 2021, there were 587 Men's Sheds open in the UK, another 141 Sheds in development and an estimated 14,088 families benefitting directly from their existence. Sheds provide community spaces for men to connect, converse and create. Many local Age UKs run *Men in Sheds* clubs for older men in their locality. Watch a video to see the work they do [HERE](#). The [UK Men's Sheds Association](#) (UKMSA) is the National support body for *Men in Sheds*. Excerpted from: Age UK [HERE](#).

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