



The Importance of Social Engagement

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OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the impacts of isolation.
- Share about social engagement.
- Consider barriers to social engagement for seniors.
- Discuss foci of the Home Alone study and how they relate to reducing the risk of isolation.
- Review results from Phase I of Home Alone study

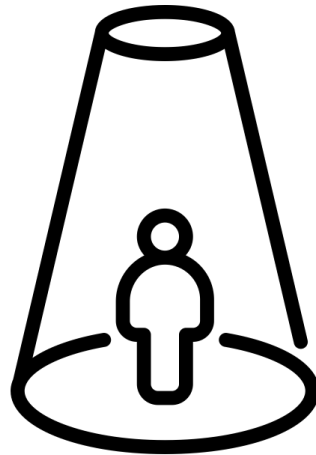
Loneliness and Isolation

- Loneliness - subjective feeling
- Isolation - objective lack of social network



Isolation

- At greater risk for physical and mental health issues
- Negatively impacts quality of life and well-being



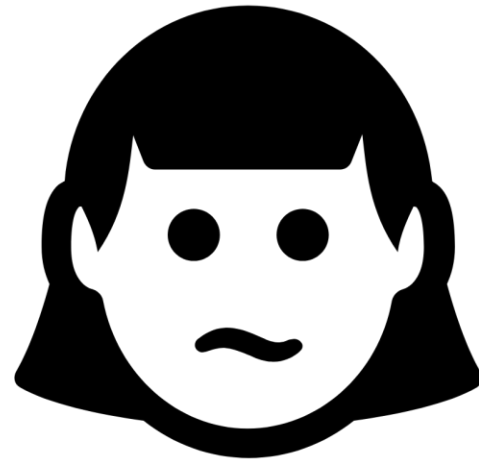
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Physical Health Problems

- At greater risk for developing:
 - heart disease
 - stroke
 - sleep disturbance
 - dementia

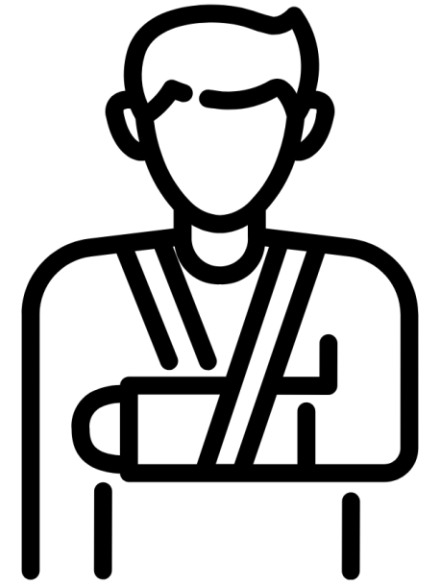
Mental Health Concerns

- depression
- anxiety
- addiction
- self-harm
- suicidality



Also at greater risk of:

- functional decline
- dependence
- nursing home placement
- hospitalization
- death



What are 2 commonly known health risks?



Social engagement is important.

It is particularly relevant for older adults due to these life-changing events...

Life Transitions

- Retirement
- Relocation
- Loss of Partner
- Becoming a Caregiver
- Development of Disease
- Immobility

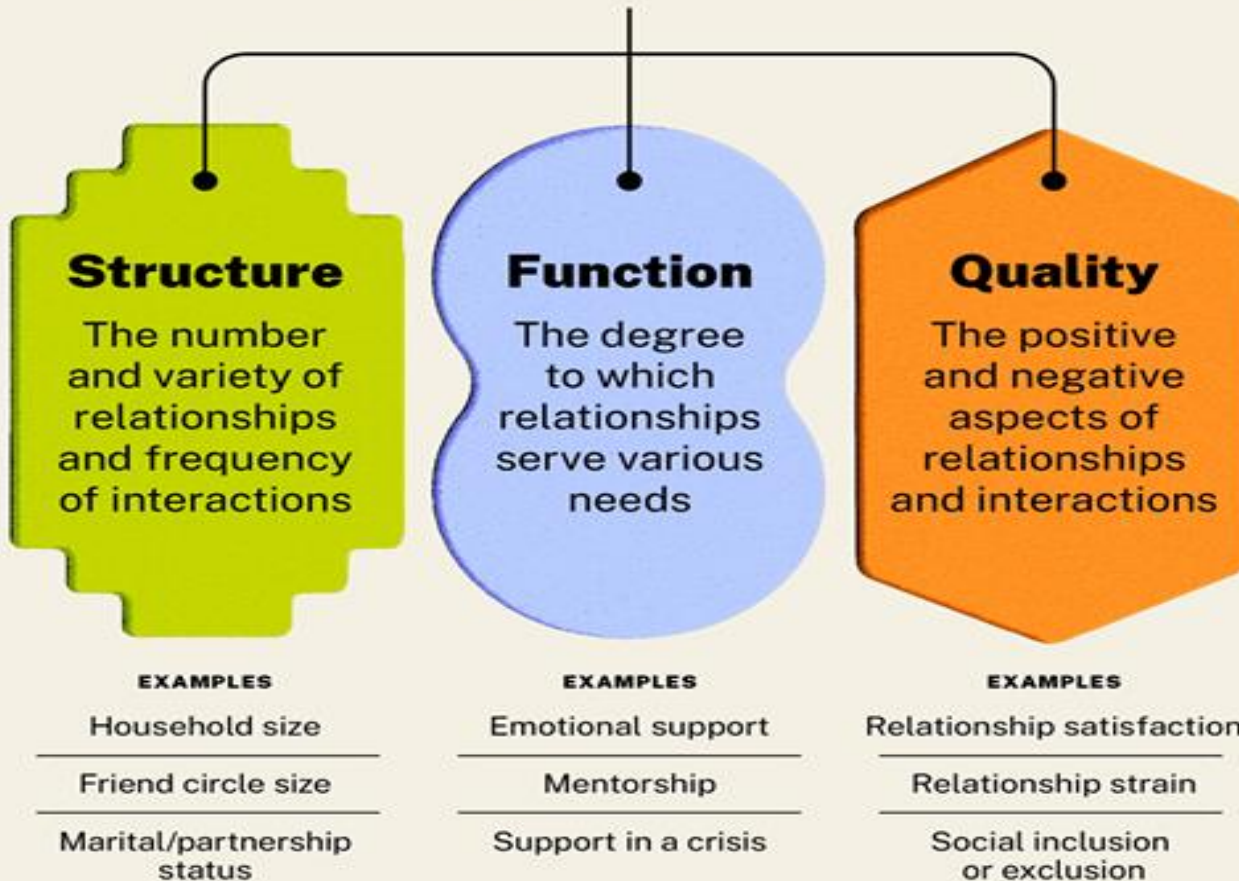


**So, social engagement is
Important.**

But, what is it?

The Three Vital Components of Social Connection

The extent to which an individual is socially connected depends on multiple factors, including:



Source: Holt-Lunstad J. Why Social Relationships Are Important for Physical Health: A Systems Approach to Understanding and Modifying Risk and Protection. *Annu Rev Psychol.* 2018;69:437-458.

 Office of the
U.S. Surgeon General

Meaningful Relationships

On a Continuum

Our **Epidemic** of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community
2023

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

FIGURE 1: The Three Vital Components of Social Connection

POSITIVES OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

High levels of social engagement are associated with:

- Positive Mental and Physical Health
- Higher Quality of Life
- Increased **Cognitive** Functioning and Better Memory
- Reduced Mortality Rates/Longer Life Spans
- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/about/living-long-well-21st-century-strategic-directions-research-aging/research-suggests-positive>

Social Engagement Activities

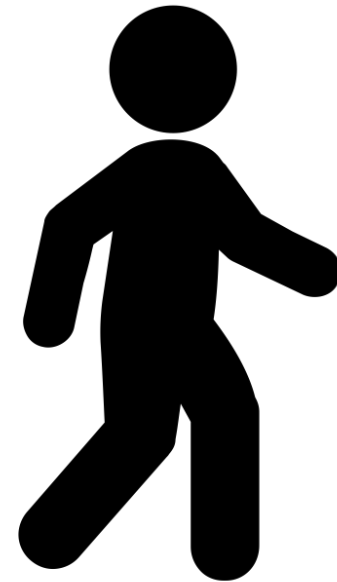
- Friends and Family
- Clubs
- Cognitive Activities
- Creative Activities
- Community Engagement
- Exercise
- Technology

Activities are important, but they do not all provide the same benefit.



Values and Values-Aligned Activities

- Meaning
- Enjoyment
- Energy
- Example: Walking



Created by Zach Hainsworth
from Noun Project



BARRIERS FACED BY SOME OLDER ADULTS THAT CAN PREVENT HIGH LEVELS OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

The older adult population is heterogeneous and consists of individuals with varying needs and facing different challenges in their everyday lives.

POTENTIAL PHYSICAL BARRIERS

- Reduced mobility
- Poor health/health conditions
- Increased frailty
- Declines in sensory-perceptual abilities
- Impaired vision
- Reduced balance
- Impaired fine motor skills
- Frequent bathroom needs

POTENTIAL COGNITIVE BARRIERS

- Declines in attention
- Declines in processing speed
- Declines in working memory
- Self-perception of memory decline
- Development of dementia

Hasher and Zacks (1988), Lovelace and Twohig (1990), Raz (2000), Ryan (1992), Salthouse (1996), Schaie and Zanjani (2006)

POTENTIAL FINANCIAL BARRIERS



- Retirement from a working salary
- Living on a limited, fixed income (e.g., Social Security, pensions, investments)
- Wealth tied up in non-liquid assets (e.g., home ownership)
- Financial hardship
- Having adult children who live with you or are financially dependent.

POTENTIAL CULTURAL/SOCIETAL BARRIERS

- “Walkability” of where you live
- Public transportation access
- Availability of activities
- Social norms about living arrangements during older adulthood



SOME IDEAS FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS

- Alternative transportation
- Online activities
- Intentional Scheduling
- Free activities
- Adjusting activities
- Senior companion services

The study I'm working on...

- Home Safety
- Loneliness and Isolation



Home Alone Study

- Living alone in independent setting with diagnosis of Mild Cognitive Impairment or subjective memory concerns
- Nationwide
- Phase I of study:
 - In the study for 3 months with 3 surveys
 - 15 participants
 - Aims:
 - to determine if the Home Alone intervention is **feasible, acceptable, and useful** to participants
 - to incorporate feedback to refine program for Phase II

Phase I Findings

Feasible, Acceptable, Useful

- Recruited 15 participants
- All completed the intervention and study
- Interviews:
 - Talking about experiences
 - Talking about values and values-aligned activities
 - Organizing; setting up routines
 - Goal setting
 - Awareness of safety concerns
 - Transportation information
 - Social connection

Structured Intervention

- 7 sessions
- Usually 1 hour long
- Weekly
- In person and/or telehealth

Home Safety

- Start with home safety
 - Home safety audit
 - Interview
 - Personalized resources
 - Examples:
 - Local transportation services
 - Handymen
 - Senior Companions
 - Local classes/events

Activities and Values

- Behavioral Activation
- Explore Values
- Identify Values-Aligned Activities
- Intentional Scheduling

Motivational Tips and Daily Living Strategies

Some examples:

- Keep it simple
- Focus on one thing at a time
- Set realistic goals (SMART goals)
- Schedule activities at times when you're most likely to succeed
- Visual cues, alarms, reminders, timers

Phase II

- Recruiting 50 participants
- Participants are in the study for 6 months
- We are also going to see if Home Alone impacted:
 - perceived loneliness and activity engagement

Changes for Phase II

- Incorporated participant feedback
 - Check on food security
 - Discuss wearables
 - Adjusted homework to make it easier/more convenient
- Incorporated coach feedback
 - Adjusted session content across sessions to make it easier to get through it.
 - Adjusted motivational tips to how coach talks about them.
 - Prioritizing vs. increasing activities

Thank You!

QUESTIONS?

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