

Transcending Loneliness:

Prevention and Remedies for Loneliness (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008):

As more is learned about the physiological impacts of loneliness, people often wonder if there isn't a pill or an herbal remedy to "fix" loneliness. For most of us (unless clinical depression or anxiety or other mental illness is involved), there is no need for chemical intervention because of cognitive and behavioral shifts that are quite effective. *Loneliness itself is not a mental illness, but rather a universal human experience and signal for self-caring action, much like hunger or thirst.*

Cognitive and behavioral approaches are quite effective in positively shifting the body chemistry as evidenced by hormones and neurotransmitters that produce the calming comfort of connection. These behaviors foster social connection in ways that make us healthier and happier. They are available to anyone and do not require a prescription or a large investment of time, effort or money. Take small steps and keep expectations modest:

- Perform "random acts of kindness" such as complimenting others, paying the toll or a cup of coffee for the person behind you in the drive-through, leaving coins in the vending machine or parking meter, opening the door or letting someone into traffic
- Seek out social activities that help others while also fostering connectivity: volunteering in ways that serve others often leads to a "helper's high"
- Step outside of our own situation long enough to serve others. Change on the inside may begin with change on the outside, by real and concrete actions
- Be open and available to others. This may simply involve truly listening to other people, even in the context of casual daily interactions
- Give others the benefit of the doubt
- Examine your cognitive perceptions and stories; is there a more positive way to reframe them?
- Remember that feelings of social isolation and loneliness are changeable and do not need to last forever
- Use the EASE model:
 - E for extend yourself: Take small steps to interact with others in simple exchanges with others, perhaps a few words exchanged at the grocery store or post office. Keep expectations low.
 - A for Action Plan: Remember that changing your thoughts, expectations and behaviors can have a significant impact on your experience of loneliness. Identify some small actions and then do them.
 - S for Selection: Exercise care as you select the people you would like to interact with. The quality not the quantity is the important thing to consider when identifying which social connections are desired to reduce loneliness.
 - E Expect the Best: Gentle, contented optimism helps us project the type of attitude that will draw others into positive social interactions. Prime yourself before going out into the world by practicing thoughts and attitudes of social contentment, and notice what happens when you interact with others. "Expecting the best helps project the best (p.242)."



In summary, loneliness is a very personal but also a very social experience. The discomfort of loneliness can act as a signal for us to choose more supportive and effective thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. Chronic loneliness puts us at risk for physiological changes that are associated with significant health declines and accelerated aging, even at the cellular level. Additionally, when we are lonely our brain's executive function is impaired, making us more likely to be demanding, critical, passive and withdrawn and also less likely to engage in health-supporting behaviors. The good news is that there are many simple actions and new thought patterns we can choose that will prevent, shorten or remedy the impact loneliness has on our health and happiness. When we engage in these self-transcendent behaviors, getting beyond ourselves to help and serve others, we not only help ourselves become resilient to loneliness, we also help others in the process.

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1. by J Holt-Lunstad - 2015 - Cited by 1019 - Related articles: Holt-Lunstad J(1), Smith TB(2), Baker M(3), Harris T(3), Stephenson D(3). Author information: (1)Department of Psychology julianne_holt-lunstad@byu.edu.

New Study: Preventing Loneliness Is Critical to Good Physical Health...

<https://observer.com/2018/01/new-study-preventing-loneliness-is-critical-to-good-physical-health/>

1. Jan 17, 2018 - A new study found that feelings of isolation and loneliness in seniors led to ... An additional study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* reported that ... Dr. Dhruv Khullar, physician at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital and a researcher at the Weill Cornell Department of Healthcare Policy and Research, wrote ...

