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The Dangers of Senior Isolation

Old age “ain’t for sissies.” There is some truth to that. Although our Golden Years can be a season to enjoy greater freedom and the fruits of our labor, they may also bring more aches and pains, memory loss, and – hardest of all – the loss of loved ones, resulting in isolation.

No one relishes the idea of aging without a spouse, close family members, or dear friends. However, living alone is a reality for an increasing number of older Americans, especially as Baby Boomers cross the 65+ threshold. According to an AARP 2012 study, about 28% (11.8 million) of non-institutionalized older persons live alone (8.4 million women, 3.5 million men). Also according to the AARP, the number of older adults without children has increased, meaning less family to interact and care for many seniors.

The decrease in social interaction as we get older is significant, and there are many reasons associated with that, including retirement, death of family and friends, loss of hearing and loss of mobility.

Regardless of the causes of senior isolation, the consequences can be harmful. Studies have shown that seniors are twice as likely to die prematurely from loneliness and feeling socially isolated. In fact, loneliness and social isolation are two times more likely to threaten a person’s health than obesity, according to a Brigham Young University study.

Tips for Battling Senior Isolation

If you are having feelings of loneliness, what can you do? If you have extra rooms, you might consider having a student live with you in exchange for chores or another senior may move in to offer companionship and shave the costs of utilities. Some roommate matching agencies offer background checks. Another suggestion is getting a pet or going to a local shelter to walk a lonely dog. Pet therapy is medicinal: it can lower blood pressure and anxiety, boost memory and contribute to a sense of well-being.

Volunteering is a great way to connect with people. You could drive elders to appointments and outings or help school-age children learn how to read. If transportation is actually a challenge, consider services such as Uber or Lyft.

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They make getting around fairly easy and affordable. Social media is a great way to stay connected. Long-term care facilities offer access to GrandCare and ConnectedLiving, and you can always connect with loved ones via Skype, Facebook, and email. 📞