



Let's Talk About Health is a regular column produced by MidCentral District Health Board. If you have any feedback or suggestions for future topics, please phone (06) 350 8945 or email communications@midcentraldhb.govt.nz

ARE PEOPLE DYING OF LONELINESS IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Risk factors that may lead to social isolation and loneliness:

- Poor health and disabilities
- Loss of spouse
- Living alone
- Reduced social networks
- Aging
- Transportation issues
- Place of residence
- Lack of economic resources
- Poor hearing or sight
- Loss of a close friend(s).

Social isolation among the elderly is a growing community issue in today's world and one which is hard to remedy. Some call it an epidemic.

When someone is isolated and lonely it can have a profound effect on their health and wellbeing. This is particularly so for the elderly in our community.

Effects can be:

- Poor diet as they stop eating well
- Risk of depression
- A weakened immune system, making them more vulnerable to infections
- Loss of social skills and confidence
- High blood pressure
- Reduced levels of physical activity and exercise
- A decline in their ability to carry out daily living tasks like bathing and dressing
- Abuse of alcohol.

More and more research is being done in this area and the findings make for stark reading. It is considered loneliness not only reduces the quality of life, but its length as well.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Connect with the elderly in your community.

- Take a little time to talk to them regularly.
- Check if they need any help.
- Invite them over for a cup of tea.
- Take them their mail/newspaper.

Make the effort to connect with your relatives and elderly friends regularly.

- Help them use the internet.
- Ring them everyday.
- Visit them.
- Go for a walk together.

Become a volunteer – there are lots of community organisations which help the elderly.

The elderly have a wealth of knowledge and experience – get them to teach you something.

If you belong to a community group, suggest they connect with the elderly.

Help connect your elderly friends and relatives with groups and activities they enjoy.

Go along with them for a few times, ensure they can easily get there.

There is a difference between living alone and loneliness. Loneliness is about social isolation.



Photo taken by: Jonathan Banks