Loneliness, the facts

Did you know?

- 1 in 3 older people are affected by loneliness.¹
- 1 million older people say they often feel lonely, 1 in 10 of the entire older population.¹
- Half of all older people in the UK (that's 5 million) consider TV to be their main form of company.²
- Over half a million older people leave their house once a week or less.³
- Nearly half of all people aged 75 and over live alone.⁴
- A shocking 370,000 over 75s spend 'zero hours' with other people on a typical day.⁵
- A saddening 450,000 older people in the UK spent last Christmas alone.⁶
- 1 in 4 older people don’t have a best friend.⁷
- 60 older people a week die alone.⁸
- As the UK population is living longer, the number of people aged 80 years and older is projected to almost double by 2030.¹
- The overall increase of older people reporting loneliness by 2030 will be around 40%.¹
- Technology has the potential to make a positive impact on loneliness, but by 2030, 10% of older people will still not have a mobile phone or use the internet.¹

Why does it matter?

- Being lonely has a significant and lasting effect on blood pressure, lonely individuals have higher blood pressure than their less lonely peers.¹⁰
- Loneliness is also associated with depression (either as a cause or a consequence) and higher rates of mortality.¹¹
- Loneliness is a big a risk to health as smoking and obesity.¹²
- Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease.¹⁶
- 1 in 10 older people visit their GP because they are lonely.¹³
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Why are we lonely?

- Being older is a crucial predictor of loneliness. And demographic change alone will drive up the number of lonely older people in the UK by 40% by 2030.\(^1\)
- Having a lack of friends is a crucial predictor of loneliness and just having friends is more important than actually seeing them.\(^1\)
- There is a strong connection between low contact with friends and family members and loneliness, contact with children is especially important.\(^1\)
- There is a strong link between having low levels of income and being lonely - older people in poverty suffer lower frequency of social contacts.\(^1\)

What can we do to change the future of loneliness?

- Affordable and accessible transport can keep older people connected to friends and family and give them direct access to clubs and activities.\(^1\)
- Supporting older people to use new technology and access the internet would help combat loneliness in the older population. 90% of older will be online by 2030.\(^1\)

We need to overcome the barriers that stop people from being more neighbourly, for example:

- 16% of us say we would like to offer to do something to help an older person, but are too afraid. 26% of us say we would like to help, but don’t know how.\(^{14}\)
- 15% of us say we would like to do something kind for an older person, but can’t find the time.\(^{14}\)
- Over half of us would like to help reduce the isolation of older people in our community, but almost 1 in 3 of us do not have the confidence to do so.\(^{15}\)

That’s why we are calling on everyone to Be a Friend and connect with older people in simple ways. Make your promise at www.beafriendtoday.org.uk and use #beafriend.

For more information about loneliness, read our Future of Loneliness report here.

For the list of sources, please see below.
Sources

1. (The Future of Loneliness, Friends of the Elderly and Future Foundation, 2014)
2. (ICM Research survey for Age UK, December 2009)
3. (Age UK (2010) Promoting Mental Health and Well-being in Later Life A guide for commissioners of older people’s services, Age UK)
4. (General Lifestyle Survey 2010, table 3.3 (GB), ONS, 2012)
5. (Centre for Social Justice, 2011)
6. (Age UK, Annual Winter Survey 2013 )
7. (James, Robert Dr (2011) Social Work, Social Policy and Older people, pp 96)
8. (Paul Burstow MP)
9. (Alzheimer’s Society)
13. (Campaign to End Loneliness Survey)
14. (OnePoll for Friends of the Elderly, 2014)
15. (Nesta)