

easing senior loneliness: it's more important than we think

(NewsUSA) — Social isolation is a little-thought-of, but growing, factor in the health and well-being of people 65 and older — and it may play a greater role than obesity as a public health hazard, according to research at Brigham Young University.

But what does “social isolation” really mean? It's how often we interact with others, and how much we enjoy those connections. In fact, social interaction is so important that it's actually a key factor in maintaining good health.

As we age, a support system is more important than ever - because often, basic life circumstances may have changed. For example, seniors may be on a fixed income, with less money to spend on eating out, or may not see well enough to drive. Bottom line, it can become difficult to fulfill the basic human need to connect with others.

“Relationships really do matter when it comes to healthy aging, because there's a strong correlation between a satisfying social life and a senior's overall well-being,” says says Ann Marie Moran, R.N. “If you're feeling isolated, the first step is to talk to your doctor, and it's important to reach out to family and friends for encouragement and support. There also are lifestyle changes we can make to better nurture our emotional health, and by extension, our physical health.”

Moran recommends five ways in which to become more active and engaged:

- 1. Socialize on Schedule.** Nurture existing relationships by scheduling a weekly phone call, coffee date, or game night with friends or family.
- 2. Volunteer.** If you love animals, consider volunteering at a local shelter, or comforting babies at a hospital.
- 3. Stay Active.** Local senior and community centers offer health and wellness activities, exercise classes, walking clubs, and social programs, often at little to no cost.
- 4. Learn Something New.** Join a book club or take a class to learn a new skill. Local libraries are a wonderful community resource, often offering seminars free of charge.
- 5. Get a Pet.** Pets are wonderful companions. Choose a pet that suits your needs. For example, an older, trained dog is easier to care for than a puppy. A cat or fish might also be a good fit.



When it comes to maintaining good health, social interaction matters. If you or a loved one are struggling with social isolation, please contact your physician.

Ann Marie Moran is a Registered Nurse and home care coordinator with The Eddy Visiting Nurse Association and VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans. Learn more about programs that can help you or someone you love at www.VNSNYCHOICE.org or call 1-855-ATCHOICE (1-855-282-4642).