



**Do you feel lonely,
or know someone
who does?**



We humans have evolved over time into social beings, which means that community, togetherness and close relationships are important for our well-being. These things have also been necessary for our survival. Feeling lonely can therefore seem a frightening prospect, and something to be avoided. Long-term involuntary solitude, where a social context is also absent, can cause stress and may eventually have a negative effect on physical as well as mental health.

But being alone can also be restorative, and everyone needs to be by themselves sometimes. To choose voluntarily to spend time alone can be good in many ways. Involuntary solitude, by contrast, can lead to both physical and mental ill health. People who live in close relationships with family and friends are often healthier both mentally and physically than people who live in solitude.

Loneliness is often associated with not having close friends and acquaintances, a romantic partner, or family members to share one's thoughts and emotions with. Feelings of loneliness are also common in people who perceive themselves as different, who don't feel noticed or understood, or who fail to find meaning in life. Such feelings

of loneliness can be just as strong for people with few social contacts as for people in large social networks, in a family, or in a love relationship. Feelings of loneliness do not automatically imply a lack of social competence.

Involuntary solitude is a situation anyone can find themselves in at any time during their life. A pupil changing schools might not make friends in their new class, or loneliness might be caused by moving to a different town to study, by getting divorced, losing a romantic partner, being on extended sick leave, or losing one's job. The path out of loneliness is different for different people, and the time it takes also varies, but support and help are available.

Self-care tips – what you can do yourself to break your loneliness

- Food, sleep and regular exercise create better conditions for well-being. Make sure you maintain your daily routines.
- Feeling needed improves our well-being, and sometimes it helps to shift the focus from ourselves to someone else. Offer to help others. Ask someone in your proximity if there's anything you can help them with – or do volunteer work.
- Don't be fearful of contacting people in your immediate surroundings. Assume that people around you wish you well. For example, you can greet, make eye contact and small talk with other people. Invite a colleague for a cup of coffee or for lunch, ask the neighbour if they want to join you for a walk, or get back in touch with old friends.
- Take the opportunity for everyday small talk. Stop for a moment and exchange a few words with people you meet.
- We all need to practise our social skills. Accept invitations to social events and activities even if you feel reluctant.
- Find other people who share your interests. Join an association or take part in activities such as courses and get-togethers, which make it easier to meet new people.
- Find new ways of socialising, such as via social media or video calls.
- Do something you like and which makes you feel good. Listen to music, read a book, or take a walk in the woods.
- Touch and physical contact, such as in a massage, increase our well-being.
- Having a pet for company can reduce loneliness. A dog will make you feel needed and can also help you meet new people outside of your home.
- Ask for help. Don't remain alone with your thoughts and feelings. Chances are you'll discover that you're not alone in your situation.
- Don't shy away from seeking professional help in dealing with your emotions and thoughts, and with any difficulties you may have run into.



What you as a fellow human being can do

Here are some suggestions for what you as a fellow human being can do if someone in your proximity is lonely.

If you see a colleague who seems to be alone, ask them if they want to join you for lunch.

Don't be afraid of saying/doing something awkward. It's often better to say something a little thoughtless than not to say anything.

Sometimes it's enough just to stop and exchange a few words.



Solitude can be deliberate and badly needed; ask the question if you're wondering.



Make contact. Making contact and asking someone how they are don't mean that you suddenly have to take responsibility for the person who may be lonely. You set your boundaries yourself.



Phone someone you think would appreciate your call. Most people can find a spare quarter of an hour during their week.

Describe different types of organisations that provide help, suggest links or contacts.

Health risks

Involuntary solitude brings health effects that can have negative consequences. Examples include high blood pressure and inflammation, which in turn increase the risk of heart attacks, stroke and dementia, among other things. There is also a connection between involuntary solitude and mental ill health.

Loneliness also increases the risk of mental health problems such as depression, and leads to memory loss and reduced cognition and concentration ability. Loneliness can also lead to a lowering of the pain threshold, which means that loneliness can come to feel physically painful.

Loneliness can damage your health

Loneliness is something we all feel, from time to time and to varying degrees, throughout our lives. For some people, however, the feeling of loneliness doesn't pass. It's quite common for people to feel ashamed about their loneliness and therefore keep it to themselves. The consequence is that they bear the burden of their loneliness alone as well. This makes loneliness both hard to talk about and hard to spot.

There are various obstacles that can make it difficult to climb out of one's loneliness and may

lead to downward spirals. A person who feels lonely can misinterpret other people's signals, and this may lead them to alienate others or distance themselves from them in order to protect themselves from further disappointments. If a person is unused to meeting other people, or if their life feels insecure, there is a risk that they'll avoid social contexts.

A person may need to practice in order to break their loneliness and become part of a social context.



Professional help and support

It can be difficult sometimes to work out by oneself what it is that causes one's negative emotions, how they can be managed, and how to begin to change the pattern. Dealing with things that feel daunting and difficult due to one's loneliness can also require help. It might be that you feel

depressed and need someone to help you think a little differently, or to learn to like yourself again.

If you need professional support and guidance, contact your medical care centre or read more about loneliness on 1177.se

If you feel lonely – take steps to break your solitude

You're not alone in feeling lonely. Involuntary solitude can bring health risks – and conversely, being part of a social context can be a health

booster. It's important, therefore, to break the solitude and to know that help is available.



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Ensamhet – så hanterar du det, Röda Korset.
<https://www.rodakorset.se/fa-hjalp/psykisk-halsa-och-psykisk-ohalsa/ensamhet/>

Röda Korset

Psykologiguiden

Ensamhet dödar – ofrivillig ensamhet i Sverige, Kerstin Thelander

Ensamhet skadar vår hälsa, Bengt Brülde, 1177.se.
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