

Loneliness Is an Epidemic

Analysis by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

✓ Fact Checked

January 26, 2023

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Loneliness has been at “epidemic” levels for several years. In a 2018 survey of Americans aged 18 and older, 46% reported “sometimes” or “always” feeling lonely
- › A World Health Organization study published in 2021 found loneliness affected up to 34% of older adults in China, Europe, Latin America and the U.S.
- › Other recent research found loneliness among adolescents ranged from a low of 9.2% in Southeast Asia to a high of 14.4% in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The highest rate – 21% – was found among elderly Eastern Europeans
- › Scientists have linked loneliness with a greater risk for obesity, heart disease, anxiety, dementia, stress, inflammation, reduced immune function, poor sleep and premature death
- › Loneliness is also associated with a greater risk of addiction, and the rate of deaths directly attributed to alcohol rose by more than 25% in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, when many were self-isolating and working from home. The trend continued into 2021, by then up 34% from prepandemic levels

Loneliness has been at “epidemic” levels for several years now. In a 2018 Cigna insurance health survey^{1,2,3} of 20,000 Americans aged 18 and older, a whopping 46% reported “sometimes” or “always” feeling lonely. More recent studies cited by El Pais⁴ include a World Health Organization paper from 2021, which found loneliness affected up to 34% of older adults in China, Europe, Latin America and the U.S.

Other recent research found loneliness among adolescents ranged from a low of 9.2% in Southeast Asia to a high of 14.4% in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The highest rate – 21% – was found among elderly Eastern Europeans.⁵

Effects of Loneliness on Physical Health

While loneliness statistics can be difficult to pin down, the effects of loneliness are well-recognized at this point. Dr. Facundo Manes, a neurologist, neuroscientist and founder of the Neurological Cognitive Institute in Argentina, likens feelings of loneliness to "a biological alarm bell that reminds us that we are social beings,"⁶ and when this alarm goes off, disease processes are set into motion. Scientists have linked loneliness with a greater risk for:

Obesity ⁷	Heart disease ⁸
Anxiety ⁹	Dementia ¹⁰
Higher levels of perceived stress ¹¹	Inflammation ¹²
Reduced immune function ¹³	Poor sleep ^{14,15}

A 2011 study¹⁶ found that for each 1-point increase on the UCLA loneliness scale,¹⁷ an individual is 8% more likely to experience some sort of sleep disruption. Research¹⁸ has also shown that lack of sleep has the effect of triggering feelings of loneliness, so the two problems tend to feed on each other.

Loneliness Raises Your Risk of All-Cause Mortality

Loneliness is also strongly linked to reduced life span.¹⁹ One 2015 meta-review²⁰ concluded loneliness can raise your risk of dying by as much as 30%. Older adults are also more likely to die within 30 days of emergency surgery when loneliness is a factor.²¹

On the other side of the coin, maintaining strong and healthy social connections has been linked to a 50% reduced risk of early death.^{22,23} As reported by El Pais:²⁴

"María Rosa Fernández, president of the Spanish Society of Cardiology's Vascular Risk and Cardiorespiratory Rehabilitation Association, explains that cardiologists are so conscious of the negative impacts of loneliness that they immediately ask patients who have suffered serious heart problems like a heart attack about their psychosocial support.

'It's fundamental. A patient who has suffered a serious cardiac episode and lives alone is more likely to experience similar problems again. A person without sufficient family support is also more at risk of developing heart failure,' said Fernández ...

Experts acknowledge that we still lack a clear understanding of how loneliness affects disease. But some specialists describe it as a continuous and vicious cycle.

One theory is that loneliness triggers a neuroendocrine response. 'People who feel lonely or who are considered to be socially isolated may show elevated activity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, an increased response to chronic stress, elevated blood pressure and high blood cortisol levels,' stated a British study published in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine.

The elevated levels of these physiological mechanisms are linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and death. It all makes sense, says Fernández. 'The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis is activated in stressful situations and loneliness causes stress.' But she also notes the significant influence of a person's lifestyle.

'All social and psychosocial factors have an impact on cardiovascular health. The exact cause is not known, but not all lifestyles are the same. Someone who lives as a couple or in a family has less cardiovascular risk. Human beings are made to live in groups and in the company of others.'

Children Harmed by Pandemic Isolation Measures

Not surprisingly, social distancing rules and lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic have only worsened already epidemic levels of loneliness, especially among children. School closures have varied in length depending on location, but overall, children as a group have all missed out on socialization to some degree over the past three years.

Loneliness, social isolation and related depression and anxiety have all been cited as likely outcomes of school closures,²⁵ driving some children with preexisting mental health issues "over the edge."²⁶ One-third of U.S. parents surveyed said their child became more sad, depressed or lonely during the pandemic.²⁷

Learning deficits have also skyrocketed. Prior to the pandemic, 57% of 10-year-olds in low and middle-income countries could not read properly. By mid-2022, that number had increased to 70%, thanks to extended school closures. In Latin America, 10-year-olds unable to read rose from 50% to 80%, and the effects could be lifelong, leading to \$21 trillion lost due to lower lifetime earnings.²⁸

Meanwhile, data show the suffering health officials and school administrators have put children through was all in vain, as the school closures had no effect on the spread of COVID-19 or COVID mortality.^{29,30}

Effects of Mask Mandates on School Children

Mask mandates have also taken a tragic toll on children, resulting in higher levels of psychological and behavioral issues including irritability, difficulty concentrating and impaired learning. A German study³¹ published in February 2021 revealed the kinds of issues children were experiencing as a result of wearing face masks for an average of 270 minutes per day.

In all, 24 health issues were associated with wearing masks that fell into the categories of physical, psychological and behavioral issues. As reported by the authors:³²

"... an online registry has been set up where parents, doctors, pedagogues and others can enter their observations. On 20 October 2020, 363 doctors were asked to make entries and to make parents and teachers aware of the registry.

By 26 October 2020, a total of 20,353 people had taken part in the survey. The group of parents alone entered data on a total of 25,930 children ...

Of the respondents 68% reported that children complained about impairments caused by wearing the mask. Side effects included irritability (60%), headache (53%), difficulty concentrating (50%), less happiness (49%), reluctance to go to school/kindergarten (44%), malaise (42%) impaired learning (38%) and drowsiness/fatigue (37%)."

Loneliness and Isolation Are Tools of Tyrants

Any sensible human being can recognize that isolating children at home for months on end will have dire ramifications for both physical and mental health. Yet school administrators, health officials and government leaders around the world ignored the basics of psychology and threw caution to the wind.

As a result of their decisions, our children may pay a lifelong price, and for all we know, that may have been the intention all along. After all, loneliness and lack of social bonding are two of the foundational parameters needed to induce mass formation in the public sphere.

Mass formation, in turn, is a psychological state that allows tyrants to implement authoritarian control, and we now know this is precisely what the globalist cabal is trying to do. As explained by professor of psychology Mattias Desmet, [mass formation](#) is a form of collective hypnosis that make people sacrifice their freedom willingly.

Considering the globalist cabal has been working toward the implementation of a one world government for many decades, and the fact that its plans span even more decades into the future, it's not outside the realm of possibility that they intentionally wanted to make an entire generation psychologically primed to accept totalitarianism.

Loneliness and Addiction Go Hand in Hand

Aside from ill health, mental health problems and a higher mortality risk, loneliness is also associated with a greater risk of addiction to cigarettes, drugs and/or alcohol. As noted in the 1992 scientific review "Loneliness and Alcohol Abuse: A Review of Evidences of an Interplay":³³

"... loneliness may be significant at all stages in the course of alcoholism: as a contributing and maintaining factor in the growth of abuse and as an encumbrance in attempts to give it up.

Concordant reports demonstrate that alcoholics do feel more lonely than members of most other groups do. In advanced abusers, loneliness is obviously connected with a number of negative characteristics and, together with several of those, directly linked to a poor prognosis."

Indeed, previous research³⁴ found "feeling of loneliness" was the most important factor influencing the prognosis of advanced alcohol abusers. The American Addiction Centers also stresses that isolation is a barrier to getting and staying sober.³⁵

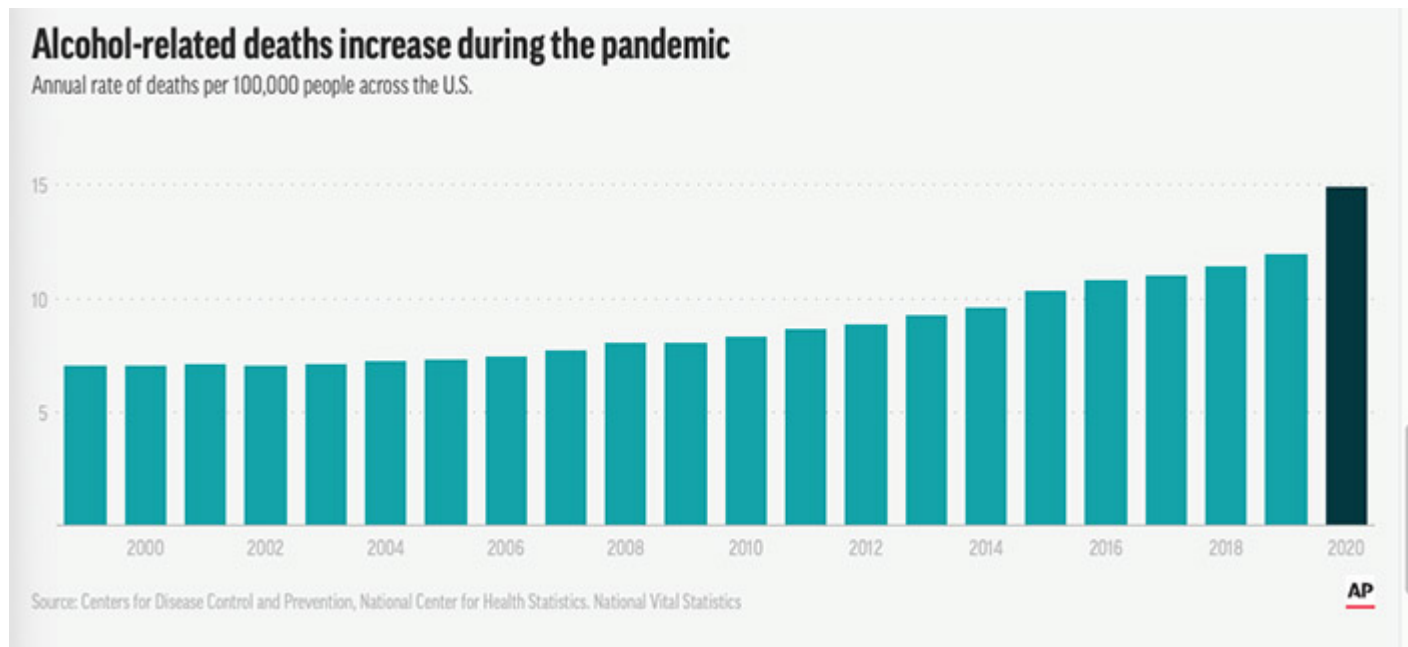
“ Loneliness is also associated with a greater risk of addiction, and the rate of deaths directly attributed to alcohol rose by more than 25% in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, when many were self-isolating and working from home. ”

It's not surprising then that deaths attributed to excessive [alcohol consumption](#) in the U.S. started trending upward in tandem with COVID restrictions.

Between 2015 and 2019, 1 in 5 deaths (20.3%) in the 20- to 49-year age group was already related to excessive alcohol intake,^{36,37} and data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show the rate of deaths directly attributed to alcohol

rose by more than 25% (25.4%) in 2020,^{38,39} the first year of the pandemic, when many were self-isolating and working from home.

The trend continued into 2021, by then up 34% from prepandemic levels.⁴⁰ Clearly, designating liquor stores as an "essential business" during the pandemic was not in the best interests of public health.



Antidepressant Use Rose Significantly Over Past Three Years

Loneliness often leads to anxiety, depression and other mental health problems, which are then treated with antidepressant drugs, and several studies have confirmed that antidepressant prescriptions have skyrocketed since the pandemic began.

In Italy, monthly antidepressant use during 2020 was on average 20% higher compared to historical averages from 2015 through 2019. During the first four and last two months of 2020, the average use was 30% higher than the previous norm.⁴¹

Research from the U.K. found antidepressant prescriptions rose by 5.1% between 2021 and 2022.⁴² Antidepressant use among children under the age of 17 shot up by 9.2%. In all, 14.7% of Britons, some 56.5 million people, were on antidepressants during those two years.

A study⁴³ that looked at prescription rates among Israelis found the pandemic was "associated with a significant increase in the slope of the incident rate of antidepressant fills."

By comparing actual prescription fills with models that estimated what the antidepressant use would have been, had there been no pandemic, they estimate the pandemic was responsible for a 2% rise in the average monthly prescription rate.

Prescription Drugs Often Make Matters Worse

Unfortunately, antidepressants often do more harm than good. Not only do they not work in most cases, they also come with a long laundry list of potential side effects. The reason these drugs are so frequently used in lieu of other interventions seems to have more to do with inertia than anything else, meaning psychiatrists are used to prescribing them and slow to embrace other techniques that require more time and effort.

It's certainly not because antidepressants have been proven to work the best. Far from it! On the contrary, studies have repeatedly demonstrated that placebos work as well or better than antidepressants. In the "60 Minutes" segment above, which originally aired in 2012, Dr. Irving Kirsch reviews this evidence.

According to Kirsch, who is the associate director of the Placebo Studies Program at Harvard Medical School, while many do appear to get better when taking an antidepressant, the response is not due to the chemicals in the drug, it's due to the placebo effect – the sheer expectation of healing.

Taking a sugar pill would provide the same effect, and typically does. In fact, the difference between the two is clinically insignificant. And not only that: Kirsch, to his surprise, discovered it didn't matter what drug was given. Virtually any drug tested against antidepressants provided the same amount of relief.

The only time you see a clinical difference, Kirsch says, is in the most extreme levels of depression. In those cases antidepressants outperform placebo, but in mild to moderate depression, which is what afflicts a majority of patients, there's no difference.

But what about all those studies supporting the use of antidepressants? After reviewing the evidence, Kirsch discovered the trick used to skew perception. Drug makers simply buried negative studies and only published those with positive results.

Drug-Induced Dependence Is Commonplace

Sadly, many have been fooled into thinking they need an antidepressant or other psychiatric drug, and end up struggling with problems that are far worse than the initial complaint. As reported by The Berkshire Eagle:⁴⁴

"I was repeatedly told that because I took it as prescribed that I couldn't be dependent and that Ativan was harmless.' Geraldine Burns, of Boston, was prescribed Ativan – one of several pills classified as benzodiazepines or "benzos" (including Xanax, Valium and Klonopin) often prescribed to treat anxiety and insomnia – after the birth of her second child in 1988.

She had complained of a 'heavy feeling' and was given Ativan in the hospital. She was referred to a psychiatrist who prescribed Ativan to be taken regularly. She began to experience anxiety, agoraphobia and panic attacks – all which she had never had before.

Burns would soon stumble upon an article in a magazine that described her initial complaints of a 'heavy feeling' as being symptoms of a uterine infection that commonly happens after childbirth. Antibiotics cleared up the infection and the heavy feeling, but Burns remained on Ativan, as prescribed by her psychiatrist.

Over the next nine years, her prescription dosage would increase and so would her medical issues. She would be prescribed antidepressants and numerous other drugs to treat her growing list of ailments ..."

Burns' story is one of several featured in Holly Hardman's film "As Prescribed." Burns became addicted to Ativan and struggled for years to get off it. As a result of her experiences.

Burns became a patient advocate and a driving force behind a new bill in Massachusetts that would require doctors to inform patients about the risks of long-term use of benzodiazepines and non-benzodiazepine hypnotics before prescribing them. The bill also requires the establishment of a protocol to wean patients of these drugs. During a hearing of the bill, Burns said:⁴⁵

"The people in this room today were all good patients. None of us took more than we were told. None of us abused them. We were told they were safe, harmless and non-addictive and that's not true.

I called my psychiatrist and told her my symptoms when I tried to stop taking the Ativan. She told me to keep taking it, that I'd have to take it for the rest of my life and to stop questioning her."

Overcoming Loneliness

If you struggle with loneliness, you're not alone. Following are several strategies, pulled from a variety of sources, that can help.^{46,47,48} It's important to realize that there's no pill or potion to cure loneliness, but there are strategies that can minimize the secondary harms it can cause.

Join a club — Proactive approaches to meeting others include joining a club and planning get-togethers with family, friends or neighbors, Meetup.com is an online source where you can locate a vast array of local clubs and get-togethers. Many communities also have community gardens where you can benefit from the outdoors while mingling with your neighbors.

Learn a new skill — Consider enrolling in a class or taking an educational course.

Create rituals of connection — Rituals are a powerful means for reducing loneliness. Examples include having weekly talk sessions with your girlfriends and/or making meal time a special time to connect with your family without rushing.

Consider a digital cleanse — If your digital life has overtaken face-to-face interactions, consider taking a break from social media while taking proactive steps to meet people in person.

Research shows Facebook may be more harmful than helpful to your emotional well-being, raising your risk of depression — especially if your contacts' posts elicit envy. In one study,⁴⁹ Facebook users who took a one-week break from the site reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction and a significantly improved emotional life.

Make good use of digital media — For others, a phone call or text message can be a much-needed lifeline. Examples of this include sending encouraging text messages to people who are struggling with loneliness, offering support and help to live healthier lives and follow through on healthy lifestyle changes.

Exercise with others — Joining a gym or signing up with a fitness-directed club or team sport will create opportunities to meet people while improving your physical fitness at the same time.

Shop local — Routinely frequenting local shops, coffee shops or farmers markets will help you develop a sense of community and encourage the formation of relationships.

Talk to strangers — Talking to strangers in the store, in your neighborhood or on your daily commute is often a challenge, but can have many valuable benefits, including alleviating loneliness (your own and others'). Talking to strangers builds bridges between ordinary people who may not otherwise forge a connection.

People of the opposite gender, different walks of life or different cultures hold a key to opening up to new ideas or making connections with old ones. In this short video, reporter for The Atlantic, Dr. James Hamblin, demonstrates techniques for learning how to talk with strangers.

Volunteer – Volunteering is another way to increase your social interactions and pave the way for new relationships.

Adopt a companion pet – A dog or cat can provide unconditional love and comfort, and studies show that owning a pet can help protect against loneliness, depression and anxiety. The bond that forms between a person and a companion pet can be incredibly fulfilling and serves, in many ways, as an important and rewarding relationship. The research on this is really quite profound.

For instance, having a dog as a companion could add years to your life,⁵⁰ as studies have shown that owning a dog played a significant role on survival rates in heart attack victims. Studies have also revealed that people on Medicaid or Medicare who own a pet make fewer visits to the doctor.⁵¹

The unconditional acceptance and love a dog gives to their owner positively impacts their owner's emotional health in ways such as:

- Boosting self-confidence and self-esteem
- Helping to meet new friends and promoting communication between elderly residents and neighbors
- Helping you cope with illness, loss and depression
- Reducing stress levels
- Providing a source of touch and affiliation

If you're looking for a furry friend, check out your local animal shelter. Most are filled with cats and dogs looking for someone to love. [Petfinder.com](https://www.petfinder.com)⁵² is another excellent resource for finding a pet companion.

Move and/or change jobs – While the most drastic of all options, it may be part of the answer for some. To make it worthwhile, be sure to identify the environment or culture that would fit your personality best and consider proximity to longtime friends and family.

Additional Resources

If you're feeling depressed or anxious on a regular basis, a strategy that can provide more immediate results is the use of Emotional Freedom Techniques, or EFT (sometimes called "tapping").

In the video above, Julie Schiffman demonstrates a tapping strategy to relieve anxiety and other challenging emotions. If you aren't familiar with EFT you'll find a library of demonstrations at "[Basic Steps to Your Emotional Freedom](#)." Videos addressing a variety of emotional states and conditions can also be found on [JulieSchiffman.com](#).

Another alternative is the Neuro-Emotional Technique's First Aid Stress Tool, or NET FAST, demonstrated in the video above. [Firstaidstresstool.com](#) also provides an excellent printable summary with visuals of the technique,⁵³ which even a young child can do. Here is a summary of the FAST procedure:

1. While thinking about an issue that is bothering you, place your right wrist, palm up, into your left hand. Place three fingers of your left hand onto the area of your right wrist where you can feel your pulse
2. Place your open right hand on your forehead. Gently breathe in and out several times while concentrating on feeling the issue that bothers you
3. Switch hands and repeat Steps 1 and 2

Suicide Prevention Resources

If you feel a sense of creeping despair, please reach out to family, friends or any of the available suicide prevention services:

- The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (U.S.) – Call 988 to speak with a crisis counselor
- Crisis Text Line – Text HOME to 741741
- Alternatively, call 911, or simply go to your nearest Hospital Emergency Department

Sources and References

- ¹ Cigna June 17, 2019
- ² Cigna 2018 US Loneliness Index (PDF)
- ³ American Journal of Health Promotion June 16, 2019
- ^{4, 5, 6, 21, 24} Elpais January 14, 2023
- ⁷ Psychogeriatrics 2019 Mar;19(2):135-140
- ⁸ Psychology and Aging March 2010;25(1):132-41
- ⁹ Exploring Your Mind December 7, 2017
- ¹⁰ Archives of General Psychiatry February 2007;64:234-240
- ¹¹ Psychology Today June 9, 2016
- ¹² PNAS January 19, 2016; 113(3): 578-583
- ¹³ PNAS November 23, 2015, DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1514249112
- ¹⁴ J Clin Diagn Res. 2014 Sep; 8(9): WE01–WE04
- ¹⁵ Psychology Medicine 2017 Sep;47(12):2177-2186
- ¹⁶ Sleep 2011 Nov 1; 34(11): 1519–1526, Results Table 4
- ¹⁷ UCLA Loneliness Scale (PDF)
- ¹⁸ Nature Communications 2018; 9: 3146
- ¹⁹ Social Science and Medicine March 2012; 74(6): 907-914
- ²⁰ Perspect Psychol Sci March 2015; 10(2): 227-237
- ²² PLOS Medicine 2010 Jul 27;7(7):e1000316
- ²³ Science Daily August 5, 2017
- ²⁵ J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2020 Nov; 59(11): 1218–1239.e3
- ²⁶ Penn State Health February 3, 2021
- ²⁷ JAMA Netw Open. 2021 Sep; 4(9): e2124092
- ²⁸ Economist July 7, 2022
- ²⁹ Public Health. 2021 Sep;198:164-170. doi: 10.1016/j.puhe.2021.07.030. Epub 2021 Aug 3
- ³⁰ Studies in Applied Economics January 2022 No. 200
- ^{31, 32} Monatsschrift Kinderheilkunde February 22, 2021; 169: 353-365
- ³³ Soc Sci Med February 1992; 34(4): 405-414
- ³⁴ Scand J Soc Med 1987;15(3):175-83
- ³⁵ Alcoholrehab.com May 18, 2022
- ³⁶ JAMA Network Open November 1, 2022; 5(11): e2239485
- ³⁷ CNN November 2, 2022
- ^{38, 40} CDC March 18, 2022
- ³⁹ AP News November 4, 2022
- ⁴¹ Psychiatry Research September 2022; 315: 114704
- ⁴² The Pharmaceutical Journal July 8, 2022
- ⁴³ Psychol Med June 10, 2022; 1-9
- ^{44, 45} Berkshire Eagle January 22, 2023

- ⁴⁶ APA.org August 5, 2017
- ⁴⁷ American Osteopathic Association, Loneliness Poll 2016
- ⁴⁸ Living Love February 21, 2017
- ⁴⁹ Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking November 1, 2016; 19(11)
- ⁵⁰ Men's Journal, Why Owning a Dog Adds Years to Your Life
- ⁵¹ New York Times August 2, 1990
- ⁵² Petfinder.com
- ⁵³ Firstaidstresstool.com