



Social Isolation

Section Summary

- Older adults who are socially isolated have a 60% greater risk of developing dementia.
- This may be because socialization is thought to be beneficial to cognition (brain function), and when socialization is lacking neural connections in the brain are weakened.
- In addition, social isolation can cause stress which also impacts brain function.
- Those who are socially isolated are more likely to:
 - be women
 - be aged 75+
 - be racial or ethnic minorities
 - be 2SLGBTQ
 - be single/live alone
 - be lower income
 - have lower education level
 - have sensory problems
 - have physical incapacity
 - have memory problems
 - have transportation barriers
 - live in rural or remote areas

Activities

Activity One: What's Making You Lonely

- Using a virtual or an IRL whiteboard, share the following list of social determinants of health.
- Ask participants to circle the ones that may contribute to social isolation and describe how they believe they are connected.
- This is a great exercise to begin to identify and think about potential risk factors of social isolation in our own lives or in the lives of others.

Economic	Physical Environment	Education	Food	Community and Social	Health Care
Employment	Housing	Literacy	Hunger	Social integration	Health coverage
Income	Transportation	Language	Access to healthy food options	Support systems	Provider availability
Expenses	Safety	Early childhood education		Community engagement	Provider linguistic and cultural competency
Debt	Parks	Vocational training		Discrimination	
Medical bills	Playgrounds	Higher education			Quality of care
Support	Walkability				

Activity Two: Shared Interests

- Pair participants off into two's and challenge them to find at least 3 things they have in common with one another.
 - These could be hobbies they share, books or movies they both like or values they both hold.
- This exercise highlights the importance of making a continual effort to upkeep and create new social connections as we age.

Discussion Questions

Consider running this as a writing exercise as people may not feel comfortable discussing this topic out loud.

- Can you recall a time when you felt isolated? If so, do you remember affecting you physically?
- What does the word "isolation" mean to you?