

INFO SHEET 1: SOCIAL ISOLATION

WHAT IS SOCIAL ISOLATION?

Social isolation occurs when an individual has limited social contact and/or too few social relationships. Social isolation is not a choice—people who experience social isolation do not purposefully choose to live isolated lives.

Here are some of the **key features** of social isolation:

- limited engagement with other people,
- few opportunities for social contact or participation in meaningful activities, and
- a perceived lack of support.^{1,2}

Social isolation is different from **loneliness**. People who experience loneliness may be isolated, but not necessarily alone. Likewise, people who are isolated may or not feel lonely.

Learn more about the Hamilton Seniors Isolation Impact Plan:

Website:
<http://socialisolation.ca>

Email:
socialisolation@mcmaster.ca

**Materials developed by:
Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging, McMaster University*

gilbrea centre for Studies in Aging



WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR SOCIAL ISOLATION?

Seniors have a greater risk of becoming socially isolated when they:

- live alone (after the death of a spouse, for example)
- experience impairments or chronic illness
- are in poor health
- experience language barriers
- live in poverty or are low income
- lack of access to services and other supports

WHY IS SOCIAL ISOLATION SUCH AN IMPORTANT ISSUE?

Social isolation can—and does—contribute to harmful health and social outcomes.

People who are socially isolated are at greater risk for heart disease, mental health concerns, and premature death.^{1, 2, 3}

¹ Nicholson, N. R. (2009). Social isolation in older adults: An evolutionary concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 65(6), 1342–1352.

² Buffel, T., Rémillard-Boillard, S., & Phillipson, C. (2015). *Social isolation among older people in urban areas*. Manchester, UK.

³ The National Seniors Council. (2014). *Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors*. Ottawa.