

Four Ways to Beat Loneliness

Everyone feels lonely occasionally, and we know that it doesn't feel good. But what you might not know is that loneliness and isolation can cause your quality of health to spiral downward, too.

A recent study from the AARP Foundation found that more than a third of adults over age 45 are lonely. And a BBC study showed that loneliness is even more widespread in younger people: 40 percent of people ages 16-24 are lonely.

The former surgeon general Dr. Vivek Murthy has said that loneliness is as harmful to your health as smoking 12 cigarettes a day. And a Brigham Young University study showed that people who identify as lonely or isolated are at a 26 to 32 percent higher risk of early death.

For all these reasons, the Blue Zones program has a focus on helping people connect, says Deb Logan, Executive Director of the Blue Zones Project—SWFL. “In Southwest Florida, a lot of people have moved from other places, so they may lose touch with those long-term friends,” she says. “It can be hard to connect, with so many people moving in and out of the area temporarily. And when we retire, we lose the daily contact with people we had at work.”

So, it's all the more important to put the relevant Blue Zones Power Prin-

ciples to work:

- **Family First:** Embrace your relationships with family to feel connected. And remember, you can build your own family if people you are biologically related to are far away.
- **Right Tribe:** Spend time with peo-



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ple who support your healthy goals. Connect with a walking group or a restaurant group that dines out at healthy places. Is there someone you can bring into the fold of your group? It will benefit you both.

- **Belong:** People who belong to a faith-based organization tend to live longer, happier, better lives. These organizations are usually good at helping people connect.

- **Purpose and Volunteering:** Whether your interest is in gardening, animals or something else, volunteering gives you a ready-made group of people and a common interest to connect over.

The fall and winter holiday season can make us feel even lonelier than usual, especially if we don't have that ideal family or friend situation that we see in commercials and holiday movies. This makes it a great time to volunteer. There are many groups that can use your help—St. Matthew's House, Café of Life, toy drives. You'll get out and about, put others before yourself and know that you're making a difference to someone.

—Anderson G.O. et al, “Loneliness and Social Connections: A National Survey of Adults 45 and Older.” AARP.org, 2018.

—Hammond, C. “The Anatomy of Loneliness.” BBC, 2018.

—Holt-Lunstad, J. et al. “Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2015.