



Are you
feeling lonely?
You're not alone.

Resources to help
fight loneliness &
social isolation



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Feeling lonely? You're not alone.

If you're feeling lonely, you're not alone. Anyone can feel lonely. Did you know that it's common to experience feelings of loneliness even when surrounded by friends and family? Or that feeling lonely can be as dangerous for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day?¹ That's why it's important for you to know, no matter your situation, there are things you can do to get the help you need.

How to use your resource kit

This resource kit is designed to help you on your journey to feeling connected and healthy, with vital information, tools, and resources you need right at your fingertips.

Inside, you'll find four sections organized with information, useful tips, and resources that may help make your life easier.*

* Remember, this communication doesn't guarantee benefits and doesn't indicate all services received will be covered by your plan. Please refer to your Evidence of Coverage or call Customer Service at the number on the back of your insurance ID card to confirm that the service will be covered by your plan.

Why do I feel lonely even when I'm not alone?

Loneliness is a feeling of sadness or distress about being by ourselves, or feeling disconnected from the world around us. It may become stronger over time, and it's possible to feel lonely even when surrounded by those you cherish most.

Loneliness can happen when we feel like we don't have a sense of belonging, meaningful social engagement, or connection to networks like our neighbors or other friend groups. But it can also happen when we have full lives and are only missing some of those things, or even just one person. Loneliness is a common emotion, and it is likely that at some point in our lives and whatever our age we will experience it.

Social isolation is when we're physically separated from other people. Sometimes this occurs because of life situations, like recovering from surgery, having children who live far away, being busy taking care of someone we love, or the fact that getting older makes it too hard to drive. It can also occur when we lose groups of friends or loved ones, or if getting out of the house just seems like too much effort.

What does this mean for me and my loved ones?

We all need the support of others to make us feel understood and to help us feel like we're making an impact on the world. Without these bonds, it's natural to feel defeated or frustrated. It can also be tempting to brush away these feelings because we think they're silly. But please know that you're not alone. Did you know that some version of loneliness impacts up to 43 percent of older adults?² And remember, it can be caused by a wide range of issues, like grief or loss, the inability to be as active as you used to, friends moving away, children growing up, losing a pet, medical conditions or surgery, or retirement.

These feelings of social isolation and loneliness, especially among seniors, can actually have a significant impact on health. For example, they can lead to a 32 percent increase in risk of stroke.³

We hope you find resources in this toolkit that can help.



Sources:

Older people and social isolation: A review of the evidence. Wirral council Business & Public Health Intelligence Team. http://info.wirral.nhs.uk/document_uploads/JSNA2015/Older_People_Social_Isolation_2015_FINAL.pdf
Senior Isolation and Loneliness. The Root Cause Coalition. <http://www.rootcausecoalition.org/research/webinars>

¹ Loneliness Is a Threat to Longevity, Even in People Who Like to Be Alone, AARP, <https://stayingsharp.aarp.org/art/connect/15/loneliness-dementia.html>

² Researchers Confront an Epidemic of Loneliness, The New York Times, September 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/health/loneliness-aging-health-effects.html?_r=1

³ Valtorta NK, Kanaan M, Gilbody S, et al. Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies. *Heart* 2016;102:1009-1016.



SECTION 1: Healthcare needs

Feeling lonely and socially isolated can be dangerous to your health. But sometimes health challenges like surgery, depression, or hearing loss can make us feel more stressed and alone.

Staying connected to your physician, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, and knowing what resources are available to you, will help you better prepare for all your healthcare needs.

Communicating with your doctor

A good doctor-patient relationship is one where you both work together to solve medical problems and maintain your health.

This also means you can talk about challenges in your everyday life, like getting to appointments, having enough to eat, and having support. We might not think about these things impacting our health or being something our doctor can help with, but the only way they will know what is troubling you and what may or may not be working is if you tell them.

Choosing a doctor or healthcare provider

The first step is to choose a doctor with whom you can speak easily and openly. Ask friends, relatives, and other medical professionals for recommendations. Ask specific questions to figure out if they might be right for you. Try to find several to choose from. When you meet with a doctor, try some of these communication tips:

- Bring a list of questions and concerns with you
- Don't hesitate to ask as many questions as you need
- If something is unclear to you or worries you, be sure to ask for an explanation and clarity until you feel comfortable with the answer

Remember that you don't have to stay with a doctor if you don't feel comfortable. You may need to meet with a few until you find the right match.

Helping your doctor understand you

Be sure to answer questions as completely and honestly as possible. This is important to help you get the right diagnosis and treatment. **Don't hesitate** to mention a symptom or experience you have. Sharing an article on the subject or telling them a story about your everyday life might help make a point.

If you realize there is something you forgot to ask during the visit, call the doctor's office. When leaving a message, it's important to explain your exact reason for calling.

Discussing diagnosis and treatment

When you receive a new diagnosis and are given treatment recommendations, you may want to raise some important questions with your doctor, such as:

- Are there other possible diagnoses or explanations for my condition or symptoms?
- What symptoms or changes in my condition might I expect?
- Is the goal of the treatment to cure my condition or just lessen the symptoms?
- Are there other possible treatments?
- Are there any foods, medications, or exercises that I should either take or avoid?

Consider bringing a friend or relative with you if you know you'll be discussing a recent diagnosis, possible surgery, or any other serious topic. Besides offering support, another person might think of questions, and can help by taking notes for later.

Sources:

Clear Communication: Talking to Your Doctor, National Institutes of Health, <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/talking-your-doctor>

Talking With Your Doctor: A Guide for Older People, National Institute on Aging, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/talking-your-doctor/opening-thoughts-why-does-it-matter>

Support after surgery

If surgery is coming up for you or someone you love, the doctor may ask questions to make sure someone will be able to help with recovery. They'll also want to know if you have someone to keep you company.

Even small surgeries come with many side effects that make it hard to be alone. It might be hard to get dressed, drive, take care of pets, or prepare food. You may find that being stuck at home recovering is lonely and makes you feel depressed.

But there are many reasons we might not have people around to support us. Some parents don't ask their children to come by because they feel like it's an imposition. Some of us are afraid to ask friends to come visit. Others feel like they should have people who will be there without being asked.

Please don't assume that other people will know what kind of help you need. In fact, they may want to help, but are afraid to call because they feel like they're bothering you!

Before surgery, **use the calendar below** to get your family and friends to write in their names on the day they'll come visit.

If you don't have family or close friends nearby, some organizations that can help find in-home support are:

- **Area Agencies on Aging (AAA):** AAA serves older adults across the country with support like transportation and in-home services. Call **800-677-1116** (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, or visit their website, www.n4a.org
- **Connect2Affect:** Connect2Affect is an online directory created by the AARP Foundation, connecting people to transportation, in-home services, and more. Visit their website, www.connect2affect.org
- **Eldercare Locator:** The Eldercare Locator is a nationwide service that connects older Americans and their caregivers with local support resources. Call 800-677-1116 (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, or visit their website, www.eldercare.gov
- **Your medical insurance:** Call the number on the back of your member ID card to see if your medical insurance covers any in-home care or support while you recover

Visitor Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Loneliness and substance abuse

Social isolation and loneliness have a huge effect on drug addiction and alcoholism. Many people turn to substances because they're lonely – and many people are lonely because they're addicted to substances. Studies show that those of us who feel more socially isolated struggle with increased mental health and substance abuse issues.⁵ The opposite is true as well: Addiction to drugs and alcohol can be the cause of isolation.

Addiction can isolate people

People who find themselves using drugs and alcohol to cope with depression, anxiety, and stress live in denial and guilt. Trapped in those overwhelming emotions, you can see why people who are addicted often cover up their fears with anger, false bravado, and verbally or emotionally abusive behaviors.

Those struggling with addiction are hurting and in turn, they hurt those around them. As the disease of addiction progresses, many people hurt their relationships with friends and family members, leaving them alone physically, mentally, and even spiritually.⁶

When we're lonely, we can run out of hope

Individuals suffering with addiction may pull away to conceal their illness and avoid feeling like they're judged or shamed. Addiction can make a person feel unable to change the situation and may take away the optimism and self-esteem needed to help relationships stay on track.⁷

Loneliness and substance abuse can make each other worse, but working on one may improve the other.

Finding help

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:

Resources and treatment locators are available online at www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/support-treatment

National Institute on Drug Abuse:

Resources and treatment locators are available online at www.drugabuse.gov/patients-families. You can also find their video series at: www.youtube.com/NIDANIH

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline:

A confidential, free, 24-7 information service in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Call **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** (TTY: 1-800-487-4889), or go to <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov> for an online treatment locator.

Sources:

⁵ Mental Health Disorders – Treatment and Counseling Services, DBT Therapy, Addiction Campuses, <http://www.addictioncampuses.com/drug-abuse-and-addiction/mental-health-disorders/>

⁶ Loneliness grows from individual ache to public health hazard, The Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/loneliness-grows-from-individual-ache-to-public-health-hazard/2016/01/31/cf246c56-ba20-11e5-99f3-184bc379b12d_story.html?utm_term=.e8dc36b9f396

⁷ Lawrence Weinstein, MD, ABHM, FAMA

Understanding the causes and impact of stress

Everyone responds to stress in different ways, and situations can cause stress unique to each individual. Here, we'll share some of the most common symptoms of stress and ways to help manage them. If you have any symptoms or questions, it's always best to speak with your doctor.



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A checklist about stress:

Some of the most common causes of stress:

- Financial strain
- Lack of personal time
- Worrying about a loved one
- Lack of sleep

Emotional symptoms:

- Anger and irritability
- Anxiety
- Sadness and loss of interest in people or hobbies
- Exhaustion and fatigue
- Isolation and social withdrawal

Physical symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Changes in weight
- Muscle tension and headaches
- Indigestion

Behavioral symptoms:

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself
- Nervous or bad habits (e.g., nail biting or using alcohol)

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Ways to dispel stress:

- Take time away to relax and do the things you enjoy – even taking a walk every day can help
- Talk to friends – sharing your feelings with people you're close to can help you feel better
- Eat healthy and exercise – being healthy gives you more energy and makes you feel good about yourself
- Get organized – prioritize and organize your schedule and your responsibilities and don't overcommit
- Look on the bright side – keep a positive attitude and a sense of humor, and remind yourself of all the great things in your life

Anxiety and depression

Recognizing and coping with anxiety

If your level of nervousness is starting to disrupt your life, it doesn't mean you're weak or crazy. You may be one of the millions of people worldwide suffering from a treatable disorder, known as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). The American Psychiatric Association definition of GAD is "persistent and excessive worry that interferes with daily activities."⁸

Meditation and mindfulness may help if you're anxious

- Try deep breathing. When you're nervous, you can stop and take some deep breaths. Slowly fill your belly and chest, then let the air out slowly as well. This simple action can provide a great deal of relief.
- Try yoga, tai chi, and other exercise. Even a 10-minute walk may enhance energy and reduce tension. It's important to talk to your doctor before starting any new exercise routine.
- Take a break. That might be a vacation, but it might also mean sitting quietly in a peaceful place, playing with your pet, or gardening.

Finding help

Anxiety and Depression Association of America: www.adaa.org

Mental Health America:
www.mentalhealthamerica.net

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline,
24 hours a day, 7 days a week:
1-800-273-8255 (TTY: 711)

Psychiatrists: www.find-a-psychiatrist.com

Psychologists: www.locator.apa.org

Identifying and helping manage depression

Some level of stress is normal. But chronic stressful situations can increase the risk of developing depression. Feelings such as sadness, anger, and anxiety shouldn't be overlooked. If you feel you have severe depression that lifestyle changes can't help remedy, you may need to seek professional help.

Some symptoms of depression:

- A change in eating habits resulting in dramatic weight gain or loss
- Feeling tired all the time
- Losing interest in people or activities that once brought you pleasure
- Becoming easily agitated or angered

Steps to take if you think you're depressed:

- Do some online research and learn as much as you can about depression
- Identify the causes of your depression – those could be something like financial strain, weight gain, or relationship problems
- Talk to a professional
- Be committed to your treatment regimen – it takes time

Sources:

Anxiety Disorders. American Psychiatric Association.
<http://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/anxiety-disorders>

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). National Institute of Mental Health.
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/generalized-anxiety-disorder-listing.shtml>

⁸ <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/anxiety-disorders/what-are-anxiety-disorders>

How can your hearing and eyesight increase loneliness?

Hearing or vision loss can be difficult to pinpoint in yourself, but can also make us start avoiding situations where it's hard to hear or see clearly because we feel embarrassed or confused.

In the U.S., up to two-thirds of adults over 70 will experience some age-related hearing loss, according to Harvard Medical School.⁹ Along with that, the CDC tells us that more than three million Americans are legally blind or visually impaired. These problems can make us feel more stressed and alone. They can also prevent us from doing activities we enjoy, like watching television, cooking, or handling our household business. If you are having trouble hearing or seeing, please get in touch with a medical professional.

Do you need a hearing test?

This quiz from the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders can help you identify if you may need to take a hearing test:

- Do you sometimes feel embarrassed when you meet new people because you struggle to hear?
- Do you feel frustrated when talking to members of your family because you have difficulty hearing them?
- Do you have difficulty hearing or understanding coworkers, clients, or customers?
- Do you feel restricted or limited by a hearing problem?
- Do you have difficulty hearing when visiting friends, relatives, or neighbors?
- Do you have trouble hearing in the movies or in the theater?
- Does a hearing problem cause you to argue with family members?
- Do you have trouble hearing the TV or radio at levels that are loud enough for others?
- Do you feel that any difficulty with your hearing limits your personal or social life?
- Do you have trouble hearing family or friends when you are together in a restaurant?

If you answered yes to three or more of these, please talk with your doctor or another hearing health provider about whether or not you need to have your hearing checked. Learn more at www.nidcd.nih.gov/hearing

Sources:

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing-ear-infections-deafness>

⁹ Hearing loss may be linked to mental decline. Harvard Health Publications. <http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/hearing-loss-may-be-linked-to-mental-decline-201301225824>



SECTION 2:

Staying engaged

Whether it's making new friends, finding a new place to live, getting around, or managing stress, staying meaningfully engaged and keeping strong connections may be crucial to your emotional and physical well-being. The following resources can help you plan for and manage many challenges and transitions.

Tips for staying connected and engaged

- Don't let being a non-driver stop you from staying active. Use the transportation suggestions in this toolkit to help find ways to get out and about.
- Pets can be great companions. Depending on your physical abilities, having a dog, cat, or other pet in the house can provide you with company and a routine.
- Use digital tools, like email, Skype, and social media, to see photos, updates, and talk to loved ones all over the country
- Schedule a few times a week to call or visit a friend or relative
- Join an outdoor or walking group near you to get exercise and meet people at the same time
- If you have activities you enjoy, like playing bridge, golfing, or crafting, join a club focused on that hobby
- Teach classes at a local community center, place of worship, or club like the Girl Scouts
- Go back to school – many local colleges offer flexible classes for adults to take or audit. These can even be online or at night.
- Volunteer for a cause that's meaningful to you. Helping hands and expertise are always welcome!

- o **Area Agencies on Aging (AAA):** AAA serves older adults across the country with support like transportation and in-home services. To learn more about the AAA in your area, or call 800-677-1116 (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, or visit their website, www.n4a.org
- o **Connect2Affect:** Connect2Affect is an online directory created by the AARP Foundation, connecting people to transportation, volunteer programs, senior centers, and more. Visit their website, www.connect2affect.org

- o **Eldercare Locator:** The Eldercare Locator is a nationwide service that connects older Americans and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources. Call 800-677-1116 (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, or visit their website, www.eldercare.gov
- o **Volunteer Match:** This service lets you find volunteer opportunities. Visit their website, www.volunteermatch.org

Sources:

Expand your Circles: Prevent Isolation and Loneliness as You Age, Eldercare, <http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/Brochures/docs/Expanding-Circles.pdf>
Technology Helps Seniors Stay Connected and Engaged, AARP, <https://states.aarp.org/technology-helps-seniors-stay-connected-and-engaged/>

Helping yourself stay sharp!

Although our brains and mental functions decline as we age, we can take steps to slow the changes and maximize our brain power. If memory loss seems extreme, please talk to a doctor.

Ways to stay sharp: Feed your brain

- Change your habits: Do your daily tasks with your non-dominant hand (if you're right-handed, try using your left, for example), or read a book in a genre you've never tried.
- Challenge yourself: Take a class, learn another language, do a puzzle, or try out word or math games
- Practice paying attention: What is everyone in the room wearing? Are there any changes in your neighborhood? Who stars in your favorite TV show?
- Review what you've done and seen: If you're reading a book, summarize its contents to yourself. Try to reconstruct your morning step by step.
- Take care of your health! All of the usual guidelines apply: Stop smoking, exercise, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep, and try to eat plenty of vegetables and fruit.
- Use your senses: Try to identify every ingredient in your food by taste. Close your eyes and listen to each background noise. What do you hear?
- If you suffer from depression or anxiety, please seek treatment

Alzheimer's warning signs

People often fear that memory loss means Alzheimer's disease. Sometimes it doesn't. Just in case, here are some other warning signs associated with Alzheimer's:

- Forgetting what things are for, like not knowing how to use car keys
- Forgetting how to do familiar tasks
- Forgetting simple words
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Putting things in strange places



Sources:

Alzheimer's Association. 10 Early Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's.
http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_10_signs_of_alzheimers.asp

Mayo Clinic. Memory Loss: 7 Tips to Improve Your Memory.
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/healthy-aging/in-depth/memory-loss/art-20046518>

Finding transportation services

Loss of mobility and transportation not only threatens independence, but also can impact self-esteem and sense of connection. The primary types of transportation services available in most communities are:

Dial-a-ride. This option provides door-to-door service from one location to another. It generally requires advance reservations, may charge a fee or request a donation on a per-ride basis, and may include passenger assistance between the front door and the vehicle.

Fixed-route service. Service is provided along an established route with designated stops where riders can get on and off. Generally, service is provided by larger vehicles and runs on a regular route that does not require reservations. Fares are paid for each ride; many communities provide a discount for senior citizens.

On-demand services: Lyft and Uber. These services come directly to someone's home and take them to any destination. Get started at www.lyft.com or www.uber.com, or download the Lyft or Uber mobile apps. You'll need an email address and credit or debit card to create an account. To learn more about setting up a ride, go to help.lyft.com or help.uber.com.

Paratransit service. This includes shared rides, subscription services, carpooling, and vanpooling. Fees may or may not be attached to this transportation option. In some cases, the passenger may need to complete an application to qualify and then be certified for eligibility.

Ride-sharing. These programs match people who need rides with volunteer drivers who have space in their cars. This service is usually scheduled in advance and has a specific destination.

Subscription service. This option consists of prearranged routes and schedules based on the needs of the passenger. Riders must register in advance for this service.

Vanpooling. This service involves prearranged ride-sharing transportation that operates regularly. Vans may be publicly or privately operated.



Transportation: Questions and ways to find a ride

Questions to ask

- Which types of services are available?
- What are the maximum and minimum distances I can travel with this service?
- What is the cost? Is it per ride or round-trip?
- Is there an application process involved in order to qualify for services? If so, who completes the form? Do I need to reapply at any time?
- Are other people picked up during my ride?
- Do I need to pre-arrange for transportation services? If so, how far in advance must reservations be made?
- Can I make advance reservations for standing appointments, like doctors' appointments, instead of calling each time?
- Can I travel with a companion, and is there a cost for additional passengers?
- What kind of physical assistance will the driver provide?

Ways to find transportation

- **American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA):** AOTA offers a nationwide database of driving programs and specialists who can help you stay behind the wheel, along with resources on safe driving as you age. Visit their website, www.aota.org/olderdriver
- **Area Agencies on Aging:** Call **800-677-1116** (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, or visit their website, www.n4a.org
- **Connect2Affect:** Visit their website, www.connect2affect.org
- **Eldercare Locator:** Call **800-677-1116** (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, or visit their website, www.eldercare.gov
- **The National Transit Hotline:** Call **800-527-8279**, Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time

Sources:

Transportation Options for Older Adults and People with Disabilities. Eldercare.gov.
https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Resources/Brochures/docs/Transportation_Options.pdf

Elders Using Public Transportation. AgingCare.
<https://www.agingcare.com/articles/finding-transportation-services-for-seniors-104572.htm>

Housing options for older adults

In recent years, housing options for older adults have branched out in extraordinary ways. Here's a quick rundown of options that can help you or loved ones live in a lifestyle that keeps you connected and supported.

Independent living: Options for healthy and independent older adults

Living at home. There are ways to modify the home to help make it safe and easy to navigate, like adding handle bars in the bathroom, widening doorways, and replacing doorknobs with handles.

Planned adult communities. These cater to retired, independent individuals who want to own an apartment, home, or condominium within a community that offers services and amenities.

Subsidized housing. Most communities have subsidized apartments available to elderly or disabled individuals with low incomes. These may

be known as public housing. There are usually long waiting lists, so it's a good idea to get on one of them as soon as possible.

Shared housing. This can be an option for those who like sharing space and living with other people. Unrelated older adults live together, sharing common areas, responsibilities, and household decisions. Roommate matching services are available. It's important to ask about information like fees, how to handle household tasks, and rules around guests.

Assisted living: Options for people who require help with activities of daily living

When choosing any assisted living residence, be sure to ask for references and check the facility's reputation.

Assisted living facilities. Services generally include medication and meal reminders, and minimal assistance with daily needs. There is access to medical services, but residents must not require skilled nursing or 24-hour care. Many long-term-care insurance policies now include assisted living in their coverage.

Board and care, personal care, or residential care. These facilities and their regulations can differ widely from state to state. In addition to housing and meals, they typically provide personal care, which

may include medication reminders as well as help with bathing, dressing, and grooming.

Continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs). CCRCs usually consist of three progressive levels of care all at the same location: independent living, assisted living, and nursing home care. People who enter a CCRC generally do so to remain in one place and have all of their care needs met as they age.

Housing options for older adults (continued)

Nursing homes: Options for adults who need 24-hour care

Nursing homes, also known as intermediate or extended care facilities or skilled nursing facilities, generally provide three levels of care:

Skilled care. These are licensed facilities offering 24-hour nursing supervision and care, physical and mental rehabilitative services, and help with eating, bathing, toileting, and mobility. Physicians are on call 24-hours a day. Specialty services, like urology, neurology, and physical or psychological therapy are also provided.

Subacute care. Some people may need the temporary services of a nursing home for rehabilitation, for example, after a hip fracture or

stroke. Families must carefully investigate whether a facility has the proper staff to provide the level of care needed for rehabilitation.

Alzheimer’s disease and other dementia care.

Some facilities offer programs specifically designed to meet the needs of people with dementia. These programs include designated units with specially trained staff, programs, and modifications for those with Alzheimer’s disease.



Sources:

What are my other long-term care choices? U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

<https://www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/part-a/other-long-term-care-choices.html>

Assessing a Nursing Home or Assisted Living for Person-Directed Care. Pioneer Network, 2017.

<https://www.pioneernetwork.net/elders-families/questions-to-ask/>

Eldercare at Home: Choosing a Nursing Home. Health in Aging, 2017.

<http://www.healthinaging.org/resources/resource:eldercare-at-home-choosing-a-nursing-home/>

Lifestyle changes and making new friends

Lifestyle changes

Making a lifestyle change can be challenging, but worth the effort. Remember to talk to your doctor before making any changes to your diet or exercise habits.

Focus on how your life will improve

Write down the ways you think making this change will benefit your life. This can help you zero in on a place to get started if the change seems overwhelming.

Monitor yourself

Each time you don't call a family member or skip an event, for example, write down your mood, the location, or any outside triggers that you think may have had an impact.

Deal with situations that trigger your unwanted behaviors

Try not to put yourself in situations that will make it hard for you to maintain your changes.

Seek help and connections

Change is hard, and outside support like friends or a coach can make all the difference.

Set reasonable goals

Aim for small goals that you can measure, like eating five to six vegetables a day, or not having a drink when you have that first craving.

Remind yourself to take it one day or moment at a time

Changing behavior is an ongoing journey that doesn't always go perfectly. What matters is whether you continue your commitment to changing your life.

Making new friends

Friends support, nurture, and positively affect our lives every day. To make new friends, be sure to go to places where you'll meet people with whom you have something in common. You could get involved in activities including:

- Classes at the local college or community center
- Community theater
- Neighborhood events
- Sporting events
- Tour groups
- Volunteer programs
- Local churches, synagogues, or other places of worship. Many of these locations will offer activities through the whole week and in the evenings, and even have transportation services to help you get to and from events

Tips for making friends

- Build confidence and work through shyness or anxiety through counseling or public speaking workshops
- Extend your own invitations to get together instead of waiting to be invited
- Realize that some relationships aren't going to develop deeper
- Let friendships grow over time instead of expecting to be close friends instantly
- Listen and learn about other people's interests and needs

Sources:

Making lifestyle changes that last. American Psychological Association.
<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/lifestyle-changes.aspx>

14 Simple Ways to Stick to a Healthy Diet. Healthline.
<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/14-ways-to-stick-to-a-diet>

How to make friends as an adult. NBC News.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/how-make-friends-adult-ncna860971>

How to Make Friends as an Adult — and Why It's Important. Time.
<http://time.com/5159867/adult-friendships-loneliness/>



SECTION 3: Supporting loved ones

Helping loved ones maintain their health and well-being is a very important and often difficult role to play. It's a role that can sometimes leave you feeling tired, stressed, trapped, or a combination of all three.

Caring for yourself while caring for others

When you're busy caring for someone else, you tend to easily brush aside your own health and personal needs. It's not always easy, but making the time to care for yourself is so important. Keeping up on doctors' appointments, social events, health, and hobbies creates a positive impact on your life. And the healthier you are, the better equipped you'll be in meeting your own needs and the needs of your loved one.

Ways to find time for yourself:

- Schedule time in your daily "to-do" list
- Create personal space in your home where you can go to relax and do the things you enjoy
- Ask family and friends for help caring for your loved one and with daily chores – but not everyone will be able to help and that's OK
- Look for ways to streamline daily tasks
- If possible, call in professional help, which may include a cleaning service or professional care provider
- Look into volunteer organizations as another option

Make time to visit your doctor for:

- A yearly physical exam
- Important screenings (e.g., Pap smear, colonoscopy)
- Shots (e.g., flu, pneumonia)
- A checkup when there are changes in your health

Here are some important things to find the time to do:

- Exercise regularly – try going for a walk, even if it's only for 15 minutes a day, or taking the stairs instead of an elevator
- Eat a well-balanced diet filled with nutrient-rich foods
- Get plenty of sleep – if you can't get enough sleep at night, try taking a short nap during the day

Caregiver support groups: A tool to help you cope

Support groups provide a safe, non-threatening environment in which to share feelings and problems, and receive feedback, suggestions, and information. There are many types of support groups, but they all give you a chance to hear from people who have gone through similar things that you and your loved one are experiencing. Support groups are based on the idea that sharing information and feelings is not only good, but also helpful for the person talking as well as for the rest of the group listening.

How to locate support groups

- Coworkers or friends
- Local hospitals
- Local churches, synagogues, or other places of worship
- Through the local chapter of an association focusing on what you're dealing with, like the Alzheimer's Association
- Your doctor, clergy person, or social worker
- Your state's Office on Aging or Agencies on Aging: Call **800-677-1116** (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time

Sources:

The Benefits of a Caregiver Support Group. Abramson Center. <https://www.abramsoncenter.org/news-events/blog/2016/september/20/the-benefits-of-a-caregiver-support-group/>

How Caregiver Support Groups Can Help. AARP. <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/life-balance/info-2017/support-groups-bjj.html>

Coping when a loved one is terminally ill

Unfortunately, many of us will experience the terminal illness of a loved one at some point. Family members often feel overwhelmed by the decisions, emotions, and daily responsibilities during this difficult period. However, there are ways to gain the support you need.

Initial questions to address include:

- Will the patient be cared for at home, in a hospital, or at a free-standing hospice facility?
If at home, who will provide the hands-on care?
- How long is the patient likely to live?
- What are the usual patterns of this particular disease or condition? Is the late-stage progression rapid or slow? How much pain is often involved?
- What else might be important to know about the late stages of this disease or condition?
- If the patient wishes to die at home, what will the actual hands-on care involve: medical equipment or any special medical procedures?

The answers to these questions may be different in each case. This is not a decision that should be faced alone. Professionals are available to educate you about this process and to help you with terminal care decisions, including:

- Patient's physician
- Hospital social worker or discharge planner
- Geriatric care manager
- Hospice intake staff

Your personal reaction and needs

At this late stage, people are often in shock. You may experience acute symptoms of grief such as sadness, anger, numbness, and anxiety, as well as disturbances in sleep, eating patterns, and memory. It is easy to become isolated from others during this period, but it's important to make sure you have regular contact with people who can support and help you.



Sources:

Give the gift that keeps on giving: straight talk on end-of-life care. STAT News, December 2016.
<https://www.statnews.com/2016/12/30/straight-talk-end-life-care/>

Mayo Clinic, "Terminal illness: Supporting a terminally ill loved one."
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/grief/art-20047491>



SECTION 4:

General community resources

American Occupational Therapy Association

(AOTA): AOTA offers a nationwide database of driving programs and specialists who can help you stay behind the wheel, along with resources on safe driving as you age. Visit: www.aota.org/olderdriver

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

(ADAA): ADAA is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety, depressive, obsessive-compulsive, and trauma-related disorders through education, practice, and research. Visit: www.adaa.org

Area Agencies on Aging (AAA): AAA serves older adults across the country with support like transportation and in-home services. To learn more about the AAA in your area, visit www.n4a.org or call the Eldercare Locator at **800-677-1116** (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time

Connect2Affect: Connect2Affect is an online directory created by the AARP Foundation, connecting people to transportation, volunteer programs, senior centers, and more. Visit: www.connect2affect.org

Eldercare Locator: The Eldercare Locator is a nationwide service that connects older Americans and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources. Visit: www.eldercare.gov or call **800-677-1116** (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time

Feeding America: The Feeding America nationwide network of food banks leads the nation to engage in the fight against hunger. To find a food bank near you, visit: www.feedingamerica.org

Friendship Line: Institute on Aging's 24-hour toll-free Friendship Line is the only accredited crisis line in the country for people aged 60 years and older, and adults living with disabilities. Trained volunteers specialize in offering a caring ear and having a friendly conversation with depressed older adults. Call: **800-971-0016**, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

Humana in Your Community: Your community Humana location is a place to start with healthy and happy. There is always something exciting going on – come enjoy a variety of special events, programs, and activities designed to help you improve your physical and mental health.

Many of the events Humana offers can be used by anyone at no cost. Humana membership is not required. Each location has a customer service specialist on site to answer your questions.

Stay happy and healthy by taking advantage of health education classes and weekly walking groups. Spend time with friends or make new ones when you attend our social gatherings and community events.

To find a location near you and learn more, visit: www.humana.com/about/humana-in-your-community

Lyft: This transportation service comes directly to someone’s home and takes them to any destination. It may not be available in every city. Get started at www.lyft.com, or download the Lyft mobile app. You’ll need an email address and credit or debit card to create an account. To learn more about setting up a ride, go to help.lyft.com.

Meals on Wheels: Meals on Wheels helps seniors across the country live healthier and more nourished lives in their own homes. Whether you’d like to volunteer with one of their local programs, or need support, visit: www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org

Mental Health America: Mental Health America offers connections to local and online support groups, community events, volunteer opportunities, and other resources. Visit: www.mentalhealthamerica.net

National Hearing Test: Access this telephone-based screening test for confidential results. View the website, www.nationalhearingtest.org

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Resources and treatment locators are available online at www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/support-treatment.

National Institute on Drug Abuse: Resources and treatment locators are available online at www.drugabuse.gov/patients-families. You can also find their video series at: www.youtube.com/NIDANIH.

SAGE LGBT Elder Hotline: LGBT elders can call when they need peer counseling, information and local resources. Call **888-234-SAGE**. The hotline is open Monday through Friday from 4 p.m. to midnight Eastern Time and on Saturday from 12 to 5 p.m. Eastern Time. Prefer to use email? Reach out at SAGE@GLBThotline.org. Visit: www.sageusa.org

Senior Corps: Conceived during John F. Kennedy’s presidency, Senior Corps currently links more than 245,000 Americans to service opportunities. Their contributions of skills, knowledge, and experience make a real difference to individuals, nonprofits, and faith-based and other community organizations throughout the United States. The program has 3 components: Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and Retired and Senior Volunteers (RSVP). Visit: www.seniorcorps.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Helpline:

A confidential, free, 24-hour a day, 7 days a week, information service in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Call **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** (TTY: 1-800-487-4889) 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, or go to <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov> for an online treatment locator.

Uber: This transportation service comes directly to someone’s home and takes them to any destination. It may not be available in every city. Get started at www.uber.com, or download the Uber mobile app. You’ll need an email address and credit or debit card to create an account. To learn more about setting up a ride, go to help.uber.com.

Volunteer Match: This service lets you find volunteer opportunities nearby. Visit: www.volunteermatch.org



The information provided in this resource kit is intended for your general knowledge only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. You should not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without consulting with a qualified healthcare provider. Please consult your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your condition. This information provided in this resource kit is current as of May 1, 2018. Information provided is subject to change at any time.