

There are ways to fight loneliness.

The Washington Post
December 5, 2021

The following is taken from the article *I'm not alone in feeling lonely. There are ways to fight loneliness* by Steven Petrow, contributing columnist for The Washington Post, December 4, 21.

I am lonely.

Okay, not all the time. I do have good friends, and a loving family. Heck, I even have a puppy. But I'm divorced, and several close friends — including a beloved ex — have died in recent years, and I'm feeling those losses deeply these days. And Zoom connections, still a part of my life, are just not as soul-filling as face-to-face ones.



Photo by Muhammad Ilyasa

To be honest, it makes me feel vulnerable, or that something is wrong with me, to acknowledge this loneliness. There's a stigma, like, "What's the matter with him?" or as a physician wrote earlier this year, "Culturally loneliness can be seen as a sign of weakness or self-pity."

But am I alone in feeling this way? Hardly.

Between 2018 and 2019, loneliness surged to 61 percent of Americans, or 3 in 5 adults, who described themselves as lonely. And that was before the pandemic.

A few months ago I gave a talk on Meetup, the social media site, about [loneliness and social isolation](#), a subject I learned a lot about in researching a book about aging.

I was dumbstruck when nearly 2,500 people joined the one-hour conversation in the middle of a workday. The hundreds of questions asked had a few common themes, including how to make new friends in a time when socializing has become dangerous for some people, and how to find meaning in life after retirement and, most basically, how to connect with others. It was painfully clear how deeply people crave connection.

Researchers have linked loneliness to higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide. It also impacts our physical health, which includes a 29 percent increased risk of heart disease and a 32 percent increased risk of stroke. It carries a significantly increased risk of premature death from all causes — a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity and physical inactivity.

Here are some practical interventions for loneliness:

- 1. Try mindful meditation.** (There are a large number of apps — some free, some paid — that can be useful for beginners. [Headspace](#), [10 Percent](#), and [Deepak Chopra's app](#) are among those I've used.)
- 2. Try expressing gratitude, or giving thanks to others.** Performing small acts of kindness for neighbors over four weeks was associated with a significant reduction in loneliness. It almost didn't matter what someone did: took out the neighbor's recycling, baked some muffins or offered to walk their dog. Anything that increased a sense of connection worked.
- 3. Focus on “authentic connection,”** which requires more than just breathing the same air as others. Forging real connection with others — dropping the facade, showing vulnerability and sharing one's true feelings — starts with being connected with yourself, knowing what matters to you and what you care about.
- 4. Using the arts** can help people, at any level of talent, to find, shape and share their personal stories. Art “allows us to express ourselves in ways that unhide us and reveal who we are.” It might also allow you to shape the events of your past in a way that feels empowering instead of stifling.

Writing on social media, however, deepens the loneliness.

But where to start? Remember that it's okay to say, ‘I'm lonely.’ ”

It's the perfect antidote, I've found, to loneliness.