

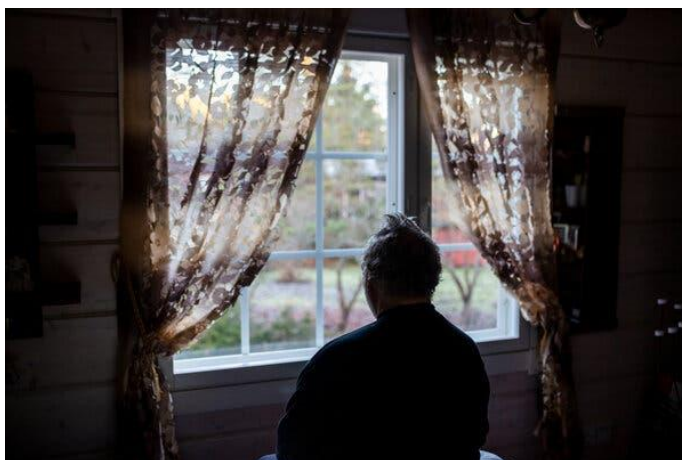
How to Feel Less Lonely

The following is excerpted from the article, “How to Feel Less Lonely, According to the Surgeon General,” by Christina Caron of The New York Times, May 5, 2023.

Americans have become [increasingly lonely](#) and isolated, and this lack of social connection is having profound effects on our mental and physical health, the surgeon general warned.

More than half of Americans are lonely, according to [a 2021 poll](#), which also found that young adults are almost twice as likely to report feeling lonely as those over age 65.

Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, the surgeon general, has [often spoken](#) about the decline in social connection and [wrote a book](#) about the subject, “Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World,” which was published in 2020. In the new advisory, he calls on the nation to strengthen its social fabric and to prioritize meaningful relationships.



Reconnect with people.

To get started, take 15 minutes each day to contact a friend or a relative. Put a reminder in your calendar, if needed, so that it remains a priority. Your relationships cannot thrive unless they are nurtured.

Even if it's only a brief conversation, show how much you value the person you're speaking with by being authentic, Dr. Murthy advised. In other words, “be real” when you're connecting with someone. It might be scary at first, but remember that people are [wired to connect](#). Sharing honestly, and inviting others to do likewise, “can be incredibly powerful,” he said.

Minimize distractions.

How often have you caught yourself looking at your phone while someone is speaking with you? What about during meals? Do other people do this when speaking with you? For more satisfying quality time, put the devices down and give your full attention.

While you're at it, scale back on social media. Virtual connection [is not a replacement](#) for in-person time with the important people in your life.

When people call, pick up the phone.

Imagine your phone ringing. You see it's a call from your best friend from college whom you haven't caught up with in a long time. But instead of accepting the call, you decide not to answer. You tell yourself you'll call back later when you have more time to chat.

Next time, Dr. Murthy said, pick up the phone and talk. If you're in the middle of something, say, "Hey, it's really good to hear your voice," and then find another time to talk. "That 10 seconds feels so much better than going back and forth on text," he said.

Serve others.

[Studies show](#) that volunteering can ease feelings of loneliness and broaden our social networks.

Consider donating your time to an organization in your community, or offering to help your family, co-workers or friends.

Get help.

Finally, tell someone if you are struggling with loneliness. It could be a relative, a friend, a counselor or a health care provider.

If you're feeling persistently sad and hopeless, and it is getting in the way of your ability to function in your day-to-day life or to participate in activities that used to bring you joy, then that's a red flag that you may need to speak with a professional.