

Five ways to connect with others and reduce loneliness

Loneliness is the feeling of being isolated, or alone. It isn't always tied to the amount of time you spend with other people, but can come from a gap between the relationships you have and the ones you need or want.

There may not be a magic cure for loneliness, but there are healthy ways to cope and reconnect socially and regain a sense of belonging. Here are five steps to reduce loneliness:

- 1 Try helping someone else**—Helping just one person at one time is a way to connect that improves the life of another, makes you feel better about yourself and can be a great way to help people and meet others who share your interests. You can smile and be friendly, stop to help a neighbor, volunteer your time or donate food.
- 2 Think about getting a pet or finding a way to interact with animals**—A pet can be a great companion, source of comfort and may also lower stress and blood pressure. If you can't have a pet, there are many volunteer opportunities to help animals in every community.
- 3 Take care of the relationships you already have**—Reaching out to friends and family can help strengthen your sense of belonging. Set aside a few hours a week to connect. There doesn't have to be a specific reason to call, and the call doesn't have to be that long. A familiar look or a loving smile can change our experience instantly, even if we are far away or unable to see each other. You never know how reaching out to just one person may connect you to others.
- 4 Find new connections through activities you enjoy**—Start or restart a hobby. Take a class to learn something new. Check out programs at the library or community center. You can invite friends or acquaintances you want to get to know better. Alternatively, you can go alone and meet people who share at least one interest of yours.
- 5 Talk with a counselor**—It can be hard to make changes on your own and scary to think about being in social situations. If loneliness makes it hard for you to go about your day, a counselor can help.

As you think about taking small steps, remember the importance of self-care to help you feel better from the inside out. Exercise, healthy eating, proper sleep, sunshine and meditation are good ways to improve your emotional health.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Contact your Employee Assistance Program at 1-866-580-9046 (TTY 711) or visit MagellanAscend.com to get started.

