HealthyLife®
LETTER

The Solutions Group

FEBRUARY
2023

Prevent loneliness

Loneliness is a risk factor for poor physical and mental health. Social support and connection are critical to well-being. While there are many reasons someone may feel lonely, social isolation is often at play.

As we age, many people experience an increase in the amount of time spent alone. If this leads to feelings of loneliness, the risk of chronic disease, stress, and dementia goes up.

Try these ideas to strengthen social support and connection:

- Adopt a pet if you can afford it. Animals provide companionship and comfort.

- Find a group that shares a common interest, such as an activity or hobby.

- Devote time each day to connecting with friends and family. Email, phone calls, texts, and video chats all work to deepen relationships.

- Volunteer with an organization you believe in.

- Join a faith-based community and get active in their programs.

- Join or start a group exercise class or club, such as a walking club.

Stroke FAQ's

A stroke occurs when oxygen flow to the brain is disrupted. Within minutes of a stroke, brain cells begin to die from lack of oxygen. As more cells die, parts of the brain become damaged and may no longer function properly.

THREE MAIN TYPES OF STROKES

- **Ischemic stroke** is caused by a blockage in the blood vessels of the brain. It is the most common type of stroke.

- **Transient ischemic stroke (TIA)**, also known as a mini-stroke, is a type of ischemic stroke in which blood flow is blocked for only a few minutes. TIA's are often a warning sign that a more severe stroke may occur.

- **Hemorrhagic stroke** is caused by a blood vessel in the brain leaking blood or bursting. The buildup of blood puts pressure on brain cells, which causes damage.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Numbness or weakness in the face, limbs, or body on one side

- Sudden vision trouble

- Confusion and difficulty speaking

- Severe headache

- Dizziness and trouble with balance or walking

Early identification of a stroke is essential to minimize harm to the brain. Every minute is critical for getting fast and effective treatment.

Knowing the warning signs of a stroke means you can quickly seek medical help. Getting medical attention within the first few hours of a stroke ensures the best possible outcome and recovery. If you suspect a stroke, call 911 right away.

EFFECTS OF A STROKE

The brain controls many essential body functions, including movement, speech, breathing, digestion, memories, and emotions. The damage caused by a stroke can lead to long-term disability or even death.

The exact impact of a stroke depends on the area of the brain affected, the length of time between the start of the stroke and treatment, and any underlying conditions.
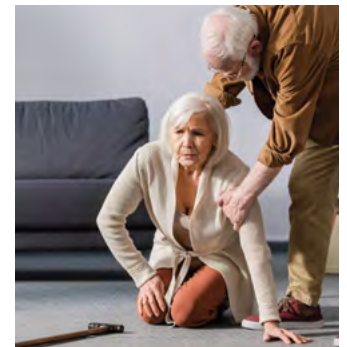
Possible side effects of a stroke include:

- Weakness or paralysis on one or both sides of the body

- Difficulty forming or understanding speech

- Impairment of memory, concentration, thinking, and judgment

- Trouble chewing or swallowing

- Bladder and bowel control issues

- Depression

Move for mental health

Movement doesn't just strengthen your body. Your mental health and well-being benefit from regular exercise, too. When you move your body, every part of you feels better. This includes your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. What's good for the body is good for the brain. While exercise is not a replacement for mental health treatment, it is a tangible way to impact your mind for the better.

REDUCED STRESS

We all experience stress on a regular basis. It's a normal and unavoidable part of life. But how we manage stress can mean the difference between a peaceful mind or one in turmoil.

Exercise is a great stress management tool. When you get your blood pumping, it releases feel-good hormones called endorphins that counteract the effects of stress. Exercising also reduces tension and fatigue, giving you more energy to manage stressful situations.

BETTER SLEEP

When you don't sleep well, it's challenging to manage your body's stress response. And when you don't manage stress levels well, your body's stress response makes it difficult to sleep.

Exercise can interrupt this frustrating cycle. By positively influencing your natural circadian rhythm, movement makes it easier to fall asleep and sleep deeply. And a healthy dose of movement helps you feel comfortably tired at the end of the day.

IMPROVED MOOD

Most people report they feel happier and in a better mood after exercise. And you don't have to be a runner to feel the benefits. Whether you lift weights or take a brisk walk, the benefits are the same. Even getting up to do some chores can shake off the "blahs."

By increasing blood flow and alertness, movement helps you feel more confident, capable, and positive. In turn, this boost in mood supports your overall sense of well-being.

BRAIN HEALTH

Mental health is directly related to brain health. A well-functioning, healthy brain thinks, feels, and copes better.

Regularly getting your heart pumping is good for the blood vessels in the brain. Exercise also protects against the build-up of plaque in the vessel walls. This helps protect the brain from damage and declining function.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Food for the brain

Mental health may seem like it's all about thoughts and feelings, but your diet plays a role in how your brain functions. Your food choices may contribute to declining mental health. On the flip side, a quality diet may help manage mental health struggles. For optimal mental health, what you eat matters.

GOOD NUTRITION HELPS

A wealth of research supports the benefits of a whole-food, plant-based diet for optimal health. This applies to mental health, too. When you choose a plant-based diet, your brain works at its best. A quality diet:

- Provides necessary nutrients for normal brain function

- Supports the health of the gut microbiome, which connects to the brain and influences mood

- Promotes resilience to stress

- Provides consistent energy to feel alert and productive

- Supplies essential nutrients to produce hormones and neurotransmitters that influence how you feel

POOR NUTRITION CAN HURT

The average Western diet is high in saturated fats, added sugars, and processed foods. These foods negatively impact your health and, over time, increase your risk of chronic diseases, including mental health conditions. Too much poor-quality food and too little nutritious food is bad for your brain. Poor diet:

- Promotes a chronic inflammatory state in the body

- Contributes to oxidative stress in the brain

- Worsens mood disorders

- Disrupts the balance of mood-boosting hormones

- Increases appetite and food cravings

GOOD NUTRITION FOR YOUR BRAIN

In a plant-based diet, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, and lentils should form the base of your meals. Lean animal foods such as chicken, fish, eggs, and low-fat dairy provide healthy protein in small portions.

Try these tips to eat well for your brain:

- Begin your day with a high-fiber bowl of oatmeal or other whole grain with fruit.

- Snack on raw vegetables, fruit, or a small handful of nuts or seeds.

- Choose healthy oils when cooking, such as olive and avocado oil.

- Limit sugary beverages and choose plain or flavored water most often.

- Add dark leafy greens to salads, soups, smoothies, and entrees for a boost of nutrients.

Source: National Library of Medicine