

# HEALTHY CONNECTIONS. HEALTHY BRAIN.

Social connection is about how many relationships you have, how different they are, the roles people play in your life, what those relationships do for you, and whether they are mostly positive or negative.<sup>1</sup>



A lack of social connection, such as social isolation and loneliness, can increase the risk of dying early. It also raises the risk of heart disease by 29% and stroke by 32%.<sup>1,2</sup>



People living in rural areas, first-generation immigrants, and LGBTQ+ community members are at higher risk for social isolation. This also includes a higher risk of physical illness, mental health challenges, hospitalization, and death.<sup>3</sup>



People who live alone, have fewer friends or family, don't talk to others often, or lack support are at a higher risk for dementia. In contrast, being more socially active - like having more friends, belonging to groups, and joining in social activities – can help lower the risk of dementia.<sup>4</sup>



Social connections of any kind can help lower the risk of dementia. It helps keep the brain strong, supports healthy habits, and lowers stress and inflammation.<sup>5</sup>



A National Strategy to Advance Social Connection can boost our nation's health, safety, and well-being. It can also build resilience for future challenges and advance civic participation.<sup>1</sup>



Public health professionals can track social connection using validated metrics (such as the Berkman-Syme Social Network Index, UCLA Loneliness Scale) to guide strategic decision-making, planning, and evaluation of strategies.<sup>1</sup>



Focusing on housing and environments that are community-centered and age-friendly makes it easier for people to join in activities and feel less isolated.<sup>5</sup>



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (2023). Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. US Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>
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- <sup>4</sup> Holt-Lunstad J. (2024). Social connection as a critical factor for mental and physical health: evidence, trends, challenges, and future implications. World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA), 23(3), 312–332. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.21224>
- <sup>5</sup> Livingston, G., et al. (2024). Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the Lancet standing Commission. The Lancet, 404(10452), 572-628. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(24\)01296-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(24)01296-0)

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