

Helping you  
or your loved  
one overcome  
loneliness

# Staying Connected

Taking  
Care

Part of AXA Health





# Dear friends,

At Taking Care, we sincerely believe that our customers are at the heart of everything we do. Our vision at Taking Care is to make independent living possible for all by providing the reassurance and peace of mind that help is available when needed. We want people to be able to be the best version of themselves.

After the pandemic, one issue that has become increasingly talked about, both by family members and their elders, is loneliness. We know loneliness can affect anyone, regardless of background, gender, or age, and we want to support our customers in every possible way.

This guide provides information, resources, and support to help you overcome loneliness, build meaningful connections, and be your best in later life. We realise that loneliness is a complex issue with no one-size-fits-all solution. That's why we've produced a guide with useful strategies and practical solutions to help you identify the underlying causes of loneliness and develop a plan to overcome it.

At Taking Care, we believe that our relationship with our customers extends far beyond the products and services we provide. We hope this guide will help you and highly recommend sharing it with others experiencing loneliness or seeking ways to build connections.

Thank you for taking a moment to read through this guide. We hope that you find it informative, valuable, and inspiring.

Warmest Regards,



**Steve Gates,**  
Managing Director, Taking Care



Rated 'Excellent' on  Trustpilot

# Feeling lonely?

**Are you feeling lonely, or do you feel a friend or a loved one might be experiencing loneliness? This guide highlights some crucial points about loneliness and the adverse effects of loneliness on older adults.**

As humans are social beings, feeling lonely is a natural human emotion. For many people, this feeling might pass with time. However, loneliness for older adults can prove to be quite challenging on a day-to-day basis.

Additionally, ageing has been strongly associated with loneliness – according to studies by [Age UK](#)<sup>1</sup>, in England, more than 2.2 million over 75s live alone, 1.9 million older people feel ignored or invisible, and 18% said they feel lonely always or often.

Loneliness is a complex emotion that can arise from life changes, such as retirement, losing a spouse or partner, children moving away from home, or any number of changes in circumstances. It doesn't necessarily depend on whether people surround you; even with close relationships, you may still feel lonely if those relationships don't provide you with the emotional support and understanding you need. On the contrary, some people may feel comfortable being alone and not experience loneliness, even if they don't have many social interactions. The critical factor is whether a person feels a sense of connection and fulfilment in their social and emotional life, be it alone or with others. It's essential to recognise that everyone experiences loneliness differently and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to overcoming it.

Isolation and loneliness can have serious emotional, social and financial consequences and can contribute to a decline in older adults' physical and mental health and quality of life.

“Loneliness poses health risks as deadly as smoking up to 15 cigarettes daily and in older people is tied to symptoms such as pain, insomnia, depression, anxiety and shorter lifespan<sup>2</sup>”.

**US Surgeon General, May 2023**




# Effect of loneliness

**There is evidence that loneliness and social isolation are associated with [reduced cognitive function](#), while those older people who are more socially engaged may experience less cognitive decline and are also less likely to develop dementia.**

Staying healthy in later life is a critical concern for everyone. People may face various health challenges as they age, including multiple long-term conditions and frailty. In addition, social isolation and loneliness increase the risk of some health problems, including cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, cognitive decline, dementia, depression and anxiety. These issues can also shorten lives and reduce the quality of life.

**If you or a loved one is coping with loneliness and social isolation, along with other health conditions, such as Dementia or Alzheimer's, these tips could help in various ways:**

- 1. Choose a person you can trust**, such as a friend or a neighbour, who can regularly visit and be on hand in case of an emergency.
- 2. Join a support group** online or face-to-face. Interacting or spending time with people who have common interests can be hugely beneficial for mental fitness.
- 3. Stay in touch with friends and loved ones** through video calls, social media, or emails. As technology advances, it becomes easier to socially connect to others remotely - if it's unfamiliar, you could also seek local classes or advice on how to use the most common applications.
- 4. Find out about home-based and community-based support** available in your area, from local authorities, charitable organisations or support groups for ageing. These organisations include [Independent Age](#) and [Age UK](#).



**“If you’re helping an older loved one, ensure to involve them in decision making about their health so they remain empowered and retain independence.”**



# Retirement leading to loneliness

**Retirement is one of the major changes in an older adult's life, as it alters familiar structure and routine. Additionally, moving from being busy to having lots of free time on your hands changes your daily schedule – it can make people feel more comfortable and slow down the pace of their lives.**

A lot of people associate their workplace with a sense of purpose and community. Losing work-related stress can be a relief, but losing touch with work colleagues can remove a significant amount of social interaction from a routine. This can even be the case for those who live with a spouse or a partner as the majority of time would normally be spent at work. After retirement, if days are filled with plenty of free time, it could lead to boredom and even social isolation, which can negatively affect physical and mental health.

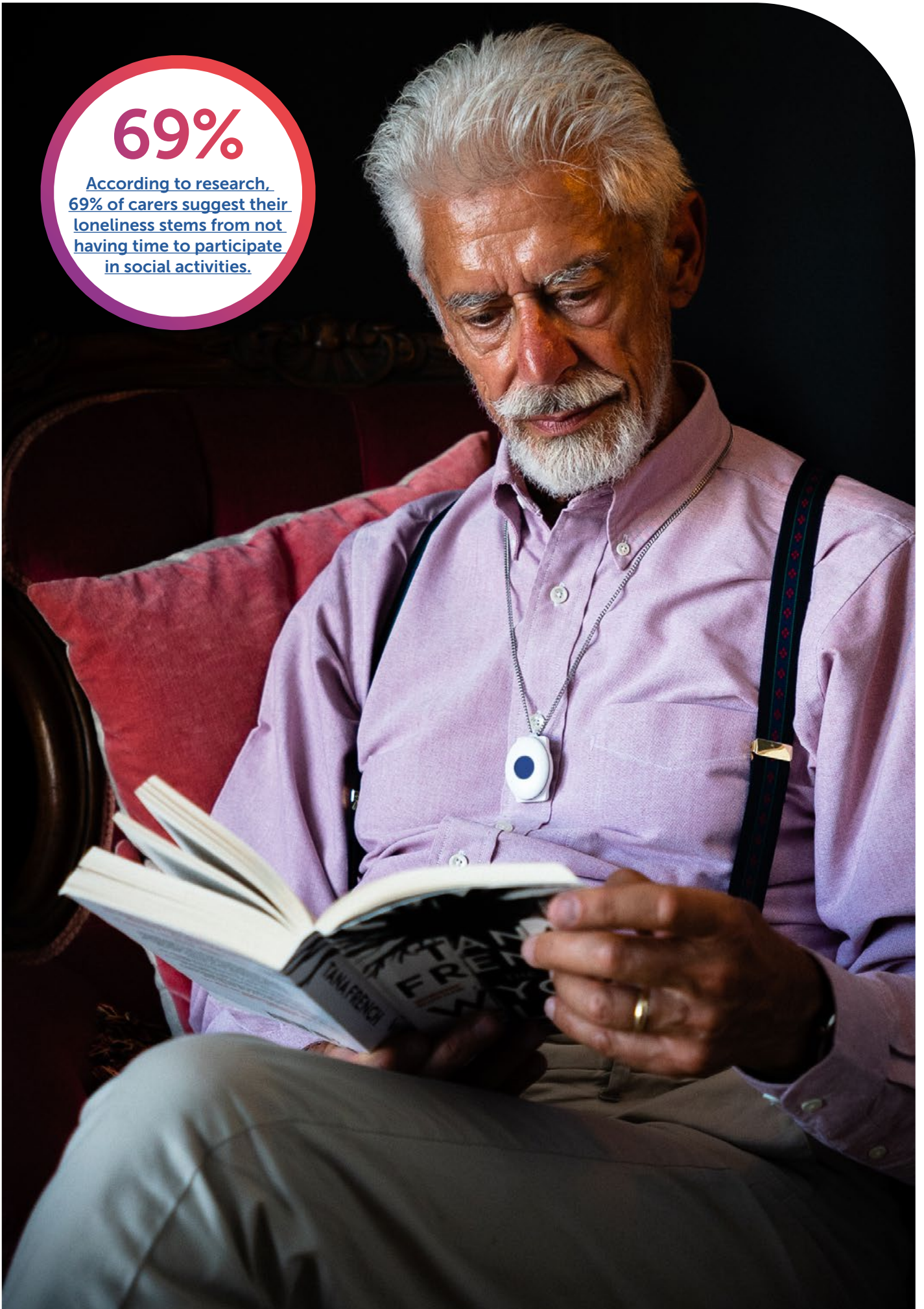
## **Tips to cope with loneliness after retirement:**

- 1. Start a new hobby.** Retirement gives you ample time to begin engaging in activities that you have always loved but have never had enough time to do. Some of the inexpensive ideas recommended by Taking Care experts are crocheting, gardening, reading and practising yoga.
- 2. Volunteer for a cause you have always believed in.** Helping communities in need is one of the most valuable ways to give back to society. It's also a great opportunity to meet new people and socialise. You can make a difference by joining any of the various [volunteering opportunities with Age UK](#).
- 3. Join a book club through your local library.** Many libraries have a social get-together every month which brings the opportunity to socialise and additionally, reading books is a great way to stimulate the mind.
- 4. Join a yoga class or a gym.** If your body allows, engage in simple yoga poses or gentle exercises that can instantly boost your mental health and improve your strength and balance. You can find some simple exercises on the [Taking Care](#) or [NHS website](#). Many of these classes have personal trainers and friendly staff to assist with queries or problems.
- 5. Keep in touch with loved ones.** If you cannot meet your friends and family every day, you can regularly do a virtual get-together with them via video calls and social platforms.



**69%**

According to research, 69% of carers suggest their loneliness stems from not having time to participate in social activities.



# Bereavement support

Older adults are more likely to lose friends and family, causing anxiety and loneliness. Coping with losing a loved one in later life can have a significant effect on older adults and make existing health conditions worse. You might be bombarded with different emotions all at the same time – you might feel vulnerable and fearful due to changing circumstances. Some people experience feelings of loneliness and depression as part of the grieving process. Along with emotional upheaval, you might experience physical changes, which might include difficulty in sleeping, loss of appetite, feeling tired and lethargic, or shortness of breath.

**Coping with bereavement can be extremely hard, but here are a few tips that might help you:**

- 1. Talk to friends or family about any overwhelming thoughts and feelings.** It can be challenging to open up about your feelings but sharing memories about your deceased loved one can help you move on.
- 2. If you feel too vulnerable or if you are alone, you can always talk to a trained specialist.** These conversations are confidential and non-judgemental. Trained specialists are there to help, listen, and get things on track for you. You can reach out to [The Samaritans](#) on 116 123 for free and they are available 24/7.
- 3. The UK government provides a [Bereavement Payment Support](#)** which is available for people who have lost a spouse or civil partner. You can claim one initial payment of £2500 and then monthly payments of £100 if you have lost your partner in the last 21 months.
- 4. Check if there are bereavement support groups local to you,** as many people go through the same experience, and sharing your feelings with them can help immensely when coping with grief.
- 5. You can also take up grief counselling** by talking to your GP.



**192,000**

In England, 192,000 older people are newly bereaved and over 106,000 will experience onset of depression.

# Befriending schemes

Friendship services through Age UK can help you form new connections and feel less lonely. Age UK offers regular [Telephone Friendship Services](#) where you can be matched with a friendly volunteer for a weekly chat, as well as take advantage of a dedicated 24-hour helpline service, [The Silver Line](#). You can call this service for a chat, day or night.

[Face-to-face befriending services](#) are also available at many local Age UKs. They will often involve a volunteer befriender visiting you at home for a chat or accompanying you to an activity.

## [Story of Len and Ivor who met through Age UK's befriending services](#)



Ivor wanted to support older people, so he decided to become part of Age UK's befriending services which connected him to Len, who's 92. Each week both spend an hour and a half talking about things and having a good time with each other.



# Carers struggling with loneliness and responsibilities

**It is true that loneliness can affect anyone, but family caregivers may feel more isolated due to prioritizing their responsibilities, resulting in neglect of their own health needs and withdrawing from their favourite activities. This can lead to poor physical and mental health, financial strain, and reduced ability to provide effective care.**

It's important to realise that you are not alone in this; a significant number of carers juggle with the responsibilities of caring for more than one person. This is more common for the carers who are also juggling work commitments. They may care for a parent and young children or someone else with a disability or long-term health condition.

## **Here are a few tips that might help ease the burden for carers:**

- 1. Join a carer's forum or social group** as talking to people who juggle the same responsibilities can be quite helpful. Your local carer service may have planned trips and outings that you can take either with or without the loved one you are caring for.
- 2. Talking to friends and family about your additional responsibilities** can help. Be specific with them in asking for their help and support with the caring responsibilities.
- 3. Befriending schemes** may be available to offer support, companionship and comfort.
- 4. Acknowledge the fact that you need to take care of yourself as well.** You can take advantage of a [free carer's assessment](#) by your local council, who will use it to decide what support to give you. Caring for another person can be tiring, upsetting and very time-consuming. You may not realise what support you are entitled to as an unpaid carer. Visit the [CarersUK](#) website to learn more about your rights and the available allowances.

**"Caring can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. 60% of carers report a long-term health condition or disability compared to 50% of non-carers."**

**Carers UK analysis of GP Patient Survey 2021**



**2 million**

More than 2 million  
unpaid carers in the UK  
are aged 65 and over –  
with almost 400,000 of  
these aged above 80.

As we get older, we should be able to continue doing the things we love and living life the way we want to.

Our articles and guides are available to read online or delivered straight to your email inbox.

**Visit [www.taking.care/healthy-ageing](http://www.taking.care/healthy-ageing) for support and advice.**



## Appendices

1. Age UK Loneliness research and resources <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/loneliness-research-and-resources/>
2. Evidence for loneliness associated with reduced cognitive function <https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/social-isolation-loneliness-older-people-pose-health-risks>