



“Loneliness does not come from having no people around you, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to you.” CARL JUNG

Loneliness is an emotion rather than a clinical category of mental health. It's not listed in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

Loneliness is different for everyone. Still, it's an emotional indicator that can't be ignored. In this article, we look at loneliness from different angles.

For starters, loneliness might be missing from the DSM, but nurses (yay, nurses!) have included it in their bible of nursing terminology, NANDA-I1. Loneliness affects physical health outcomes in illness and is a risk factor for depression².

What does it feel like ?

Identifying whether you may be at risk for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety is an important step in self-care. You need to figure out how you feel about your loneliness and what steps you might take to resolve bad feelings.

Or, as the Canadian Mental Health Association notes: **“Loneliness can create more loneliness.”**

This resource is not intended as a substitute for medical advice. The reader should regularly consult their health care provider in matters relating to their health especially about any symptoms that may need diagnosis or medical attention.



For the patient: You could find yourself lonely for a stretch of time and take it in stride. You might be grateful for quiet time to recover from diagnosis, surgery or sensory overload. Your lonely spell could simply be Phase One in long recovery.

On the other hand, you could be missing people in your life, and feel excluded from the busier world around you. Are you overwhelmed by health issues and spiraling into solitude? Or strangest of all, you could be surrounded by people yet unable to communicate what's really going on inside. Sometimes it feels easier to shut others out.

For the caregiver: One important paper outlined the potential impact of brain changes in the patient. The paper lists factors such as vision loss, auditory processing difficulties and brain speed -- some of the many brain tumour-related issues that can limit social engagement.

The author of the paper outlines how brain tumours can result in cognitive deficits that can interfere with social skills: [“Although they have been rather minimised, social deficits are particularly relevant in patients ... who frequently report loneliness and social isolation.”](#) (This paper may provide a roadmap for caregivers, or topics of discussion with a medical professional.)³

What it is

Loneliness is Different from Isolation

“Loneliness is different from isolation, but it is connected. Isolation means being on your own. Loneliness is a feeling of being alone, isolated or disconnected from the world around you, and can happen even if you're surrounded by family, friends and acquaintances. This could be because you may feel that you don't have anyone to talk to about what you're going through. Or you may feel unable to voice your feelings and experiences for fear of upsetting people, particularly those close to you.”⁴

Signs of chronic loneliness

- Inability to connect with others in a satisfying way. (Feeling disconnected from conversations even when with others.)
- No close or “best” friends who understand you.
- Feeling isolated and overwhelmed when surrounded by others.
- Negative feelings of self-worth and doubt.
- When you try to connect with people, feeling unheard or misunderstood.
- Feeling drained and burned out by socializing⁵.





Stepping forward

Support groups for people affected by brain tumours - virtual and real-world. Some are for patients, some are for caregivers, and some are for both. If you're nervous about talking, come to your first meeting armed with a question for the group.

Remember that you may still be in shock and expect the worst from social encounters. Your brain may be on alert for threats or problems. Start by expecting the best from people, remember good times, and fuel your engagements with positivity. It could help.

Consider your hobbies and interests and find a class nearby or online. Pick up an old hobby with a new perspective, or try something new. You might make new acquaintances in class, or have a new topic to discuss when you do meet up with your old pals.

Exercise classes. Often, community centers offer seniors classes for all kinds of fitness levels, including chair exercise. Most will allow non-seniors to join and attend a class once a week. Movement with friendly faces, even in a class of strangers, can help with isolation.

If you're up to it, try volunteering. Most local organizations will find a role to adapt to your current abilities: For instance, some organizations arrange for housebound folks to make weekly phone calls to an isolated senior. A local community garden might need an hour of help just pulling weeds. It might be as simple as greeting people at a meeting once a month. Just be realistic and clear about your limitations, whether they be in time or effort.

Make the most of the small opportunities. Enjoy nature when you can, and those small chats with strangers in the park -- even about the weather! -- can be just as good for your brain as a long and possibly exhausting heart-to-heart with an old friend.



Supporting someone with Loneliness

Caregivers can find themselves increasingly isolated during the course of any illness, especially cancer. The brain tumour scenario provides a host of other complications including the patient's cognitive deficits and personality changes. Support for the caregiver can slip to the wayside.

This review of papers on brain tumour caregivers found: "Studies examining the experience of caring for brain tumor patients specifically indicate that existential concerns comprise a considerable domain of unmet need, more so than among other informal caregivers."

- Consider joining a caregiver support group. Oftentimes, caregivers are welcome at the patient meetings and the topics that arise may give you ideas to discuss.
- Speak to your own physician about any overwhelm you feel. There may be support available in your community for emotional concerns, daily care needs or respite care.
- Let family and friends know if your needs are increasing. Be prepared to ask for help, and start with small requests such as "Could you give me an hour to do some shopping?"
- Free or donation-based sites such as Caring Bridge allow you to set up a private, online journal to keep in touch with family and friends. You can post updates, ask for help, receive supportive comments, and reply to comments. It functions as a private social network in a time of crisis. It may help with in-person connections, too.



Caregiver Resources

Caregiver Corner - The Brain Tumour Foundation - Canada

<https://www.braintumour.ca/care-support/caregiver-corner/>

Brain Injury Canada issued a tip sheet during the pandemic for [Encouraging social engagement during isolation](#) that has some ideas for digital tools.

If you're a friend, make sure your visits and conversations are pleasing and if possible, not rushed. Put away your phone for stretches of time. Avoid responding with what's known as [Toxic Positivity](#).

Ways to help and cope when someone you love is diagnosed with a brain tumour

<https://www.thebraintumourcharity.org/media-centre/news/support-news/ways-cope-when-someone-you-love-diagnosed/>

Caring Bridge: Video on how it works

<https://www.caringbridge.org/how-it-works/>

What You Need to Know About Toxic Positivity

<https://rightasrain.uwmedicine.org/mind/well-being/toxic-positivity>

Resources

Loneliness: Causes and Health Consequences (Website)

<https://www.verywellmind.com/loneliness-causes-effects-and-treatments-2795749>

Loneliness and Chronic Illness: The Inspiring Ways 8 Patients Cope With It (Website)

<https://creakyjoints.org/support/coping-with-loneliness-chronic-illness/>

Loneliness and Isolation from the Brain Tumour Charity (Website)

<https://www.thebraintumourcharity.org/living-with-a-brain-tumour/health-fitness/mental-health/loneliness-and-isolation/>

Canadian Mental Health Association: Loneliness Causes and Effects and Treatments (Website)

<https://www.verywellmind.com/loneliness-causes-effects-and-treatments-2795749>

Canadian Mental Health Association: Coping with Loneliness (Brochure)

<https://cmha.ca/brochure/coping-with-loneliness/>

Loneliness as a Component of Psychiatric Disorders (Scientific abstract)

<https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/430545#:~:text=To%20date%2C%20loneliness%20has%20been,the%20index%20of%20that%20work.>

Relationship Between Loneliness, Psychiatric Disorders and Physical Health ? A

Review on the Psychological Aspects of Loneliness (Scientific article)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4225959/>

Nanda Nursing Diagnosis List: Loneliness and Isolation

<http://www.nandanursingdiagnosislist.org/functional-health-patterns/social-isolation/>

Social Interactions and Well-Being: The Surprising Power of Weak Ties (Scientific article)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0146167214529799>



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3. Caregivers' quality of life and psychological health in response to functional, cognitive, neuropsychiatric and social deficits of patients with brain tumour: protocol for a cross-sectional study
4. <https://www.thebraintumourcharity.org/living-with-a-brain-tumour/health-fitness/mental-health/loneliness-and-isolation/#:~:text=Feeling%20alone%20or%20isolated&text=Brain%20tumours%20are%20unique%20because,affects%20your%20ability%20to%20work.>
5. <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/chronic-loneliness#:~:text=What%20are%20the%20main%20signs%20and%20symptoms%20of%20chronic%20loneliness%3F>
6. Existential distress among caregivers of patients with brain tumors: a review of the literature

Carefully curated by individuals affected by brain tumours for individuals affected by brain tumours with sound scientific background on topics that are important to us.

We would love to hear your feedback and any suggestions or comments you may have at info@twosteps.ca



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