



## Staying Centered: The Benefits of Being Social

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 28% of people aged 65 and older live by themselves. When you consider that the coronavirus pandemic required almost all Americans to remain socially distant over the last year, many more seniors report feelings of loneliness and isolation. A study by the Division of Geriatrics at the University of California, San Francisco found that 43% of older adults regularly feel lonely—and that was before the pandemic.

It doesn't have to be that way. Socialization has many benefits for seniors. It has been proven to be one of the most beneficial ways to improve one's mental health. Socialization also enhances cognition, memory recall, and mood. The benefits multiply when that socialization includes such activities as exercise and brain-stimulating games like cards or bingo. A 2019 study in Britain showed that 60-year-olds who visited with friends almost daily were 12% less likely to develop dementia than those who only saw one or two friends every few months.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the National Institute on Aging has found evidence linking loneliness to heart disease, depression, obesity and more.

So how do you find ways to be social, especially if you have not been in the past? One easy way is to seek out older adults near you. Senior centers offer

many of activities for people of all abilities, most of which are offered free or at a nominal fee. Many have fitness rooms with circuit exercise equipment or pools for those who want to combine exercise with socialization. They also offer bingo, art or educational classes, computer training, and special interest clubs. Potlucks enable you to break bread with other seniors while enjoying a nutritious meal. A round-up of senior center activities also reveals the following:

- Special events, from monthly birthday lunches to art shows and craft fairs.
- Field trips.
- Regular screenings of new or classic movies.
- Tax preparation assistance.
- Health and wellness classes on diabetes, healthy eating, fall prevention and much more.

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If you are interested in sharing your expertise or giving back to your community, many centers offer volunteer opportunities. If you are interested in extra income, they may also provide employment resources.

Staying social and reaping the benefits is as easy as finding your local senior center and exploring all they have to offer.