

NEWS RELEASE

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Loneliness twice as bad for health as obesity

New research from the University of Chicago has found that loneliness has double the effect on early mortality then that of obesity.

Feeling extreme loneliness can increase an older person's chances of premature death by 14 per cent, according to research by psychologist Professor John Cacioppo [1]. This compares with a seven per cent increase in mortality risk for obese people, found in previous research.

Commenting on the research, Jack Neill-Hall, Campaign Manager for the Campaign to End Loneliness, says:

"These findings add to the growing body of evidence showing the profound impact loneliness can have on our health. For example, loneliness has been linked with the early onset of disability, cognitive decline and cardiovascular disease. It is also closely associated with poor health choices. Lonely people are more likely to smoke, drink to excess, have a poor diet and are less likely to exercise enough.

"The comparison the research makes with obesity will help people to understand that loneliness is not just a sad state of affairs, it is a genuine public health issue. There are nearly a million older people in the UK who describe themselves as always or often lonely.

"Encouragingly, local authorities are increasingly recognising the need to invest in services which support people to keep up their social connections, develop new friendships to fill the voids that can be left by bereavement. But more can and should be done to make sure people don't face loneliness unsupported."

-ENDs-

Facts about loneliness [2]:

- Those who are lonely are at higher risk of the onset of disability and those who are deafblind are at considerable risk of loneliness.
- 17% of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week, and 11% are in contact less than once a month.
- Over half (51%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone
- Half of all older people (over 5 million) say the television is their main company
- 9% say they feel cut off from society
- 61 of the 128 published Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies have acknowledged loneliness and/or isolation as serious issues. However, over half of all health and wellbeing boards with published strategies (53%) have not recognised that loneliness and/or isolation are issues that need addressing.

NOTES TO EDITORS

[1] John Cacioppo, University of Chicago, 16 February 2014: <http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2014/02/16/aaas-2014-loneliness-major-health-risk-older-adults>

[2] Full referencing for these facts can be found here: <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/loneliness-research/>

The Campaign to End Loneliness is network of local, regional and national organisations and individuals working together through community action, good practice, policy and research to combat loneliness and isolation in the United Kingdom.

Anyone can make their voice heard in their own area by letting their local health and wellbeing board know about the problem of loneliness and isolation – more information is available on our website: <http://bit.ly/1amMJCX>

The Campaign has five partners who lead the strategic direction of the Campaign: **Age UK Oxfordshire, Independent Age, Manchester City Council, Royal Voluntary Service** and **Sense**. More information about the Campaign can be found at: www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk