**Engagement Combats Loneliness**

Loneliness increases as we age due to living alone, losing friends and family, and dealing with physical and mental changes which may lead to chronic illness. Loneliness often leads to depression and increased anxiety which may then deteriorate the desire to participate in life.

Research shows that the health risks from loneliness call for urgent action. Some of the leading health risks are:

* Social isolation increases the risk of premature death and rivals that of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.
* Feeling lonely puts an individual at higher risk of cognitive decline and memory loss.
* Loneliness that leads to stress causes higher hormone levels of cortisol which affects the body in many ways from inflammation to how the immune system responds to illness.

If you are an older adult who is lonely and feeling more anxious or depressed, or if you’re a family member who cares for an older adult who seems to be isolated or lonely, it’s important to act as soon as possible.

**How to help.**

Engagement stimulates the brain, which reduces the effects of cortisol, leading to increased happiness and wellbeing. Engagement comes from various types of activities, such as socializing, athletics, hobbies, volunteer work, even paid work. For engagement to be successful it must be important and enjoyable to the older adult.

Whether you are the older adult feeling isolated or you are a family caregiver observing a change in your loved one, socialization is very important. It is known to both stimulate thoughts and communication while creating connection.It’s very important to have social interaction on a regular basis. If it is safe to have interaction in a person-to-person environment, schedule regular visits with family and friends.

If it is unsafe to meet in person and you are unfamiliar with the technology used to make remote social connections, reach out to the younger members of your family to get assistance. Some local senior centers have tech resources you can call for a volunteer to help you set up a tool. Even if remote connections are difficult, plan to use your telephone to call friends or family and keep the connection alive. If you are a friend or family member, remember that it is important to make regular contact with those who are living alone. They may not feel up to reaching out, so your calls may be their only connection to the outside world.

Physical engagement is powerful. Perhaps enjoying kayaking or golfing is of interest. Walks, swimming, and bike riding are all good athletic activities to stimulate your mind and keep your body in good shape. If you feel that you are unable to do the physical activities that you enjoy, reach out to us because there may be a creative way to help you enjoy these things again.

Mental engagement keeps your mind healthy. Playing games that stimulate your mind and include things such as use of memory or cognitive processes are beneficial to reduce cortisol. They also help increase reaction time, decision making, and processing speed.

**Engagement is key.**

If you or a loved one need to revisit activities that will help you combat loneliness and don’t know where to start, reach out to us and we’ll be happy to help.