



Church Boosts Health and Wellness in Seniors

By Jason Lewis

Aging brings many changes in life. Getting older may mean that your activity slows down a bit, and the years can have a way of putting distance between you and old friends, which results in less social interaction. For seniors, the risk of isolation is high. Loneliness is not a path to good health, so it's essential for seniors to be engaged. One way to increase social engagement and battle loneliness is to become involved in a church, and such spiritual connectedness may benefit health as well.

Isolation in seniors

It's common for seniors to become stuck in a routine that contributes to loneliness. Money may be tight on a fixed retirement income, and some may just not want to see people. If a senior is retired, their interactions with others can be limited to neighbors or family members who may occasionally visit. But being shut-in and locked away from the rest of the world is detrimental to physical and emotional health. The AARP has identified social engagement in meaningful

activity as a [central component](#) to healthy aging. Those who remain in isolation carry more health risks than those who are socially active.

One way that seniors can overcome isolation is to do activities with other people — church goes in particular! There are numerous activities available for people of all ages. However, developing an exercise routine is a splendid way to both overcome isolation and get moving. The SilverSneakers program, in particular, [focuses on senior health](#) by allowing them to use participating fitness centers without having to pay any additional costs — assuming they have enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan.

Religion and health

Spirituality, especially when exercised in group worship, benefits senior health. [Studies show](#) that people who go to church are healthier than those who are not active parishioners. There are a few reasons for the health and church connection. While religion can be a personal and solitary experience - a communion between a person and a higher power - church attendance is a communal activity with others. Church, after all, means more than a physical place of worship, but the group of worshipers. And this communion with others brings meaningful social interaction into the lives of participants. For seniors who may have extra time due to retirement, church social functions and charitable activities fill their schedules with positivity and purpose.

Mindfulness and health

In addition to the health benefits of gathering with others, religion can make those who practice more aware of themselves and their mortality. Isolation can numb people to their reality, and not in a positive, optimistic way. [Mindfulness](#) allows people to become more engaged and enjoy their days without experiencing stress about the past or anxiety about the future. Being self-aware also improves physical health, with medical research supporting its ability to help with gastrointestinal disorders, heart disease, and blood pressure concerns. Living in the moment even [strengthens mental health](#), ranging from sleep problems to marital difficulties.

Beyond loneliness, when addiction risks poor senior health

Mindfulness also can positively impact senior health regarding the less-discussed topic of addiction in older adults. Some seniors have life-long battles with substance abuse, and others may have developed their habits as a consequence of aging. The awareness fostered through church attendance can help those struggling with addiction and recovery. It can be difficult to make ourselves focus on the here and now, especially if we're going through a transition as life-changing as [addiction recovery](#). But taking even a few minutes a day to be mindful of all we have in the present moment — and especially all we have to be grateful for — can help us feel more at peace with ourselves, our surroundings and our circumstances.

Churches have long been a source of addiction and recovery support. And they have stepped in as a helpful weapon in the [fight against the opioid crisis](#). Churches offer information about

addiction, 12-step meetings and strong social connections that replace destructive, unhealthy behaviors with positive and enriching ones.

For many reasons, church attendance can be a salvation for senior health and loneliness. Whether a senior is looking for activity or seeking answers to higher questions, spirituality can result in engagement and better well-being.

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