

SONOMA SENIORS TODAY

The Loneliness and Isolation Epidemic

By Coby LaFayette

Coordinator, Sonoma Wine Country Games

Even before COVID forced a global understanding of social isolation, the statistics were grim—one in two adults in America admitted to being lonely. That being the case, chances are pretty good that you know someone feeling lonely and/or socially isolated. Maybe that someone is you? What COVID did was put an exclamation point on the importance of meaningful connections for all of us.

What's the Difference?

- **Loneliness**—That distressing feeling of being alone or separated from people.
- **Social Isolation**—Refers to the lack of social contacts or having few people you can regularly interact with.

Loneliness has been the topic of hundreds of scientific papers, numerous clinical studies, and many documentaries. In fact, so much focus has been placed on loneliness and isolation that in 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community published Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation.

"Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity."

Wow! And it's not just an American problem. Britain's Campaign to End Loneliness began in 2011 and discovered through their Promising Approaches Framework that "Services which can make a real difference to older people's lives include psychological support, one-to-one sessions, volunteering opportunities, volunteer befrienders, group sessions (in person and online), age-friendly communities and holistic neighborhood approaches."

Battling the Epidemic

Here at Council on Aging (COA), our frontline against loneliness is two-pronged and based upon the concept that sharing a meal with someone is an integral part of human connection. Those frontline programs are the Lunch Companion and the Tellegacy Programs. Volunteers share conversations and healthy meals with homebound seniors in our community in both programs.

Lunch Companion Program

The Lunch Companion Program matches clients with a volunteer "companion." COA provides a free lunch if the pair decides to meet during mealtime. Companions meet with seniors in their homes once a week for an hour to share a meal and chat. The program is not time-limited, so it goes on as long as the client and volunteer find it beneficial.

The Tellegacy Program

The second prong in our battle against loneliness is the Tellegacy Program. This program was the creation of Dr. Jeremy Holloway, whose intent was to foster an opportunity for intergenerational connections between older adults (legacy holders) and college student volunteers (legacy builders). At COA, our Tellegacy Program welcomes volunteer legacy builders of all ages.

Unlike the Lunch Companion Program, this program is time-limited and goal-oriented. In the Tellegacy Program, the client and volunteer meet over lunch for 8 weeks to look at photos and talk specifically about the senior's life. At the end of 8 weeks, the shared stories and some pictures are brought together by the volunteer and the program coordinator to create a book—the story of the client's life. Thus, a "legacy," and a beloved snapshot of that person's life becomes available for the client to marvel over and the family to treasure.

Clearly, Tellegacy and our Lunch Companion Programs enhance social connections, provide emotional fulfillment, and stimulate cognitive engagement in our senior clients through storytelling and reminiscing. These experiences promote well-being and foster a sense of belonging that keeps loneliness at bay. And both programs prove what we already know: a meal can be about much more than just the food.

Lunch Companion Volunteer Lee Stumbaugh would agree. "Seeing the world through the eyes of another human being of a different generation and actively assisting them in preserving and appreciating their life story—that's life enrichment through relationship building," he said.

Stumbaugh admitted to being surprised by the relationship, adding, "It's really eye-opening to get to know someone from another generation and to find common ground. It one hundred percent changed my outlook and how I interact with another generation."



A Tellegacy Client and Volunteer

So, if you're looking to shake up your worldview and meet some fascinating people, we are currently looking for volunteers in both programs. If be-friending a senior over a "free lunch" sounds like something you'd like to do—weekly, biweekly, or monthly—please reach out to Jennifer Kulpa at 707-525-0143 ext.100 or jkulpa@councilonaging.com.

Evaluating the Risk for Social Isolation and Loneliness

The National Institute on Aging has devised a list of social isolation and loneliness risk factors. Consider using this as a tool for evaluating friends, family, co-workers, and yourself. Remember, we are all in this together and need to keep an eye on each other!

- Loss of mobility
- Vision or hearing problems
- Psychological or cognitive challenges
- Feeling a lack of purpose
- Financial struggles
- Living alone
- Lack of transportation
- Inability to leave home without help
- A major life change, such as the death of a family member or retirement
- Separation from friends or family
- Lack of social support
- Caring for a loved one who is unwell
- Living in a rural, unsafe, or hard-to-reach neighborhood
- Experiencing discrimination based on age, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, or gender identity
- Language barriers

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Things You Can do to Help a Senior Combat Loneliness

It’s easier than you might think to make someone feel good about themselves. Here are some ways in which you could brighten the day of someone who might be feeling lonely or isolated from friends and family.

- Check in regularly, in person or by phone
- Encourage (and share) hobbies
- Support the maintenance of existing friendships
- Play music they enjoy listening to (and sing along)
- Help them find a group or club that aligns with their skills and/or interests
- Suggest appropriate volunteer opportunities
- Teach them how to use technology like video calls to stay connected to friends and family
- Explore adopting a pet
- Help them find and take a class
- Offer to help them join a senior center
- Encourage physical activity, especially outdoors
- Be mindful of any signs of loneliness
- Listen with empathy and encourage storytelling
- When/if necessary, suggest professional support





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Legacy



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PUZZLES & GAMES

Puzzle solutions are on page 8

WORD SCRAMBLE
"New Year's Resolutions"

1. SIXECREE	- - - - -
2. EANRGID	- - - - -
3. VUEOLRENT	- - - - -
4. ETDTLUCER	- - - - -
5. TDIE	- - - -
6. EIASPPNSH	- - - - -
7. ILKGNWA	- - - - -
8. YELECRC	- - - - -
9. NEDOAT	- - - - -
10. RAAMHOTN	- - - - -
11. EVSIDKY	- - - - -
12. ROPLEEX	- - - - -

SUDOKU - Medium

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SUDOKU - Hard

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2				8				

WORD SEARCH
"Academy Award Winners"

STREEP	BRANDO
DiCAPRIO	WASHINGTON
OLIVIER	STEWART
NICHOLSON	POITIER
BOGART	McDANIEL
BARRY	FONTAINE

CROSSWORD PUZZLE
"Happy New Year!"

ACROSS

- 1 Untied
5 Errs
10 Press with lips as a sign of love
14 Portal
15 Sporty car brand
16 Colored part of eye
17 Promise to change something in the future
19 For fear that
20 Sun's name
21 Propel with oars
23 Spread
26 Applesauce brand
28 Ripen
31 Note of debt
32 Citizen of libya
33 North northwest
34 Small pieces of colored paper
37 Render able
39 Injured
40 Toady
42 Corset
45 Tenor sings high
49 Party favor
50 Tapered spike of frozen water
53 Present
54 Extension (abbr.)
55 Knobby
56 Many times
58 Villain
60 Rio de Janeiro
61 Harsh criticism
63 Police cars (2 wds.)
69 Factor of ten
70 Architect Frank__ Wright
71 Gets older
72 Attorney (abbr.)
73 Sugar-free brand
74 Run

DOWN

- 1 Former president of U.S.
2 Caviar
3 Goddess
4 Jagged
5 Ancient European region
6 Fall mo.
7 French "yes"
8 Cold in manner or attitude
9 Holy places
10 Terminate
11 Scotland neighbor
12 Sister for short
13 Supersonic transport
18 Down
22 "__ and World Report"
23 Attack
24 Also
25 Bolt
26 Small amount
27 Kimono sash
29 African antelope
30 Ram's mate
32 Long-term memory
35 Be airborne
36 Alleviating
38 North northeast
40 Season
41 Brew
42 Her
43 Excise
44 Allure
45 Farm credit administration (abbr.)
46 Explosive
47 Foot extension
48 Possess
51 Two
52 Utopian ideas
56 Cooking fat
57 Having focus
59 Yes
60 Traveled by car
61 Those who make the food laws (abbr.)
62 Permit
64 Kid
65 Seed bread
66 Past
67 Representative
68 Compass point

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By Jimmy and Evelyn Johnson - www.qets.com

WORD SEARCH "Academy Award Winners"

A	K	K	P	W	H	L	S	T	R	E	E	P	Z	T	O
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A	Y	E	M	C	D	A	N	I	E	L	J	P	V	M	J
P	T	W	R	K	F	O	N	T	A	I	N	E	H	S	S
R	W	B	F	S	B	A	L	M	A	W	K	N	R	W	T
I	B	A	A	O	L	I	V	I	E	R	M	V	A	Z	E
O	U	N	S	R	A	W	E	F	P	N	A	E	W	Q	W
C	J	I	M	H	R	G	V	O	O	O	V	Z	B	H	A
L	L	B	E	Q	I	Y	K	D	Q	J	I	T	P	P	R
L	K	O	P	I	M	N	N	P	R	W	H	T	E	B	T
P	I	G	M	K	T	A	G	W	G	U	F	C	I	W	U
A	L	A	C	K	R	Z	I	T	S	K	N	V	R	E	G
Y	O	R	E	B	Z	Q	R	O	O	Z	B	L	O	Y	R
F	Z	T	A	N	Z	F	Y	T	O	N	J	D	G	V	H

Caregiver Tips for Moving a Loved One

by Margaret Kapronos
Realtor, Berkshire Hathaway

Moving is stressful for anyone, especially for a family caregiver who is faced with relocating a loved one. As a Senior Real Estate Specialist, I have helped many seniors and their families successfully navigate a move, both as a Realtor and again as a Manager in an Assisted Living facility.

The biggest hurdle is dealing with one's possessions. The number one tip is to start sooner instead of later. By now, most seniors have acquired a household of possessions tucked into bedrooms hardly used, the garage, and the attic, especially if they had families. Many still hold "shrines to once upon a time" in their homes. When adult children are asked to go through these 'shrines,' they often don't have the same attachment to these items as their parents once did. Engaging adult children early to find out their thoughts and ask for help with sorting, keeping, or disposing of items can provide relief and minimize stress when it comes time to make a move.

Memories are held in each possession, but it's important to recognize that taking all these belongings to another space, often much smaller, isn't in a senior's best interest. If possible, get a floor plan of where you are moving to or the square footage of each room. Some folks can eyeball measurements accurately, but many can't. Determine, before moving in, what furniture pieces will work.

Safety is another concern for seniors. Overstuffing a room can make navigation difficult, especially if mobility is an issue. It's best to create open areas in each room for easy navigation. Bulky furniture may impede movement. Furniture should fit the scale of a room, and if your current furniture fits a much

larger house, consider buying new furniture. Leave behind furniture that has had a better day, perhaps stained, or marred by pets, or just too old and lumpy!

Our kitchens are often filled to the brim with gadgets, pots, and pans of all sizes. Will your loved one be cooking, and at what level? Will they be entertaining for parties of six or more? If not, consider offloading these items, perhaps to a friend or family member, who would happily loan them back for an occasional party. Otherwise, the kitchen remains an excellent place to downsize without the tug of memories that books, games, personal treasures, and more might stir up.

Consider donating items to non-profit organizations that could utilize these treasures, such as homeless and women's shelters or Goodwill. Sotheby's can be called in to help assess items of value they could sell at auction, which works well for artwork.

With keepsakes you just can't part with, consider organizing them to give them a space of honor. Can you place them in a bookcase or shelving in the new home to help keep tables and countertops free of clutter? The mantra "less is best" is a good rule of thumb for figuring out which items can stay and others go.

Lastly, get as much help as possible from senior organizations and professional organizers. They can help you determine what to keep, what not to keep, and how best to transition. Hire them to do the decluttering, organizing, and packing.

Remember, moving can open one up to new experiences, whether new friends, a new environment, or the close proximity to family elsewhere. Embrace the challenge and opportunity, bless the past, and look forward to this new chapter in life!

What Can You Do if You're Moving a Loved One with Dementia?

By Jamie Escoubas, Council on Aging

Moving a loved one with dementia can be especially challenging, as it often involves more emotional and practical considerations. Here are some tips to help make the process smoother:

Maintain Familiarity

- **Keep familiar items close**—Surround your loved one with their favorite belongings, such as photos, blankets, or objects that remind them of home. Familiar smells, textures, and sounds can provide comfort.
- **Replicate their old environment**—try to set up their new living space to resemble their old one as much as possible. The layout, colors, and furniture arrangement can all influence how they adapt.

Ensure Safety

- **Safety precautions**—Ensure the new environment is safe and accessible, with clear signage and necessary modifications such as grab bars, non-slip mats, and easily navigable spaces.
- **Maintain regular communication**—keep in touch with caregivers or staff in the new home to monitor how your loved one is adjusting. Regular check-ins can help you address any issues early.

Minimize Stress During the Move

- **Limit the amount of change at once**—if possible, avoid making multiple changes (e.g., changing caregivers or routine) all at once. Transitioning slowly will help your loved one adjust more quickly.
- **Reduce chaos on moving day**—a move's noise, hustle, and bustle can be very overwhelming. Try to keep the environment calm and organized on the actual day of the move.
- **Use simple, clear instructions**—people with dementia may struggle to follow complex instructions or long conversations.

Provide Emotional Support

- **Be patient**—dementia can cause emotional responses that may differ from the person's usual reactions. They may feel anxious, scared, or angry. Stay calm and offer comfort without pressuring them to adjust quickly.
- **Be aware of nonverbal cues**—pay attention to signs of discomfort, confusion, or distress, and respond gently with reassurance.

Moving a loved one with dementia is never easy, but with patience, preparation and support, it's possible to reduce stress and make the transition easier for both them and you.

MOW Testimonial

By Kitty Lum, Intake Specialist & PEARLS Coach

Born in Missoula, Montana, on February 9, 1956, DL spent most of his childhood in the San Francisco Bay Area. Entering the world with the challenging condition of spina bifida, his parents were told he might not live beyond 18 months. Defying expectations, DL has shown an incredible spirit and is living well into his senior years.

As the only member of his family to graduate high school, DL pursued his passion for art, first attending the College of San Mateo to study commercial art before transferring to Skyline College (SC) in San Bruno. He embraced acrylic painting, his favorite medium, and created a remarkable body of work. One notable series features the fairgrounds in Missoula, where he won first place in the art contest at the Missoula Fair for three consecutive years. Among his many creations, his favorite is a rendition of Jean Honoré Fragonard's famous painting, "The Swing," which impressed his instructor at SC.

DL finds joy in living beyond the limits set by his doctors and cherishes his artistic fulfillment. Known for his great humor, he often lightens the mood. His guiding principle is simple yet powerful—"Never give up!"

Due to mobility issues, DL relies on Meals on Wheels (MOW) for nutritious meals, which are lifesavers. He appreciates the convenience and especially enjoys the vegetables that form the core of his daily meals. DL is genuinely grateful for the support MOW provides, helping him maintain his quality of life while he embraces his passion for art.

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For decades, Council on Aging has had the privilege to offer Day Respite Programs giving seniors who live with dementia a safe and engaging group space to spend their day, while providing caregivers with much-needed respite.

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NUTRITION NEWS

3 Ways to Maintain Healthy Eating Habits as You Age



As we continue to age and experience bodily changes that occur with aging, it's no surprise that our nutrition needs also change. Nourishing our bodies with a balanced diet ensures we're providing our bodies with the essential building blocks for continued health and strength. So, let's talk about a few ways you can ensure you're equipping your body to age like fine wine!

Create a balanced plate that prioritizes color. This means when you are preparing to eat a meal, ensure half your plate has fruits or vegetables (or a combination of both!), a quarter is a starch source, and the last quarter is a lean protein source. Fruits and vegetables add a variety of nutrients to our diet and are an excellent source of fiber, which has many health benefits! When choosing a starch, also known as a carbohydrate, like potatoes, rice, beans, or chips, try to have half of the carbs you eat in a day be whole grains. Choosing whole grain options like brown rice, whole wheat or multigrain bread, wheat pasta, or quinoa are excellent sources! Lastly, lean protein options like chicken, turkey, low-fat cuts of red meat, tofu, eggs, and more are excellent sources of protein that help keep our muscles intact.

Avoid saturated fats, excess salt, and added sugars as much as possible. While moderation is key, eating a diet that primarily has excess amounts of these items can be detrimental to our health. They not only impede the function of our heart and circulatory system but eating a lot of added sugar significantly increases your risk of developing insulin resistance, which is the leading cause of Type 2 Diabetes. When grocery shopping, be sure to read the food labels. *Look for foods that have less than 1g of saturated fat, less than 140mg of sodium (or salt), and less than 5% of added sugar per serving size.*

Consider eating smaller, more frequent meals. Have you noticed your appetite waning as you age? Sadly, that is normal. However, it is still very important to ensure you are eating an adequate amount of calories and protein to maintain optimal bodily function and movement. This may be more doable by eating 4-5 smaller meals (that still include protein, carbs, and fiber!)

Bonus tip: Stay hydrated! Hydration plays a huge role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. If water is not appealing, try tea, bone broth, or high water-content fruit like watermelon, cantaloupe, or citrus.

If you'd like to learn more about maintaining a healthy diet as you age, contact your doctor or call Vanessa, COA's registered dietitian, at 707.525.0143 x137.

By Vanessa Hasslinger, MS, RDN, Council on Aging
Sources: National Institute of Aging, National Council on Aging, United States of Agriculture Department (USDA.)

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City	Location	Dates & Hours	Start / End Date	Text / Phone #
Santa Rosa	Franklin Park Clubhouse 2095 Franklin Avenue	Monday – Thursday and Select Fridays 9:30 am – 2:30 pm	Feb 3 / Apr 15	707-582-0251
Santa Rosa	Rincon Valley Regional Library 6959 Montecito Boulevard	Friday 12:15 – 4:15 pm	Feb 7 / Apr 11	707-582-0251
Santa Rosa	Oakmont Village Berger Center Fireplace Room, 6633 Oakmont Drive	Monday & Wednesday 9 am – 3 pm (Closed 4/7)	Feb 3 / Apr 14	707-582-0565
Healdsburg	Healdsburg Community Center 1557 Healdsburg Ave.	Thursday 10 am – 3 pm	Feb 6 / Apr 10	707-582-0251
Petaluma	Petaluma Community Center 320 N. McDowell Boulevard	Monday 9 am – 2 pm (Closed 2/17)	Feb 3 / Apr 14	707-408-3190
Rohnert Park	Rohnert Park Senior Center 6800 Hunter Drive	Friday 9:30 am – 2:00 pm (Closed 4/4)	Feb 21 / Apr 11	707-582-1983
Sebastopol	Sebastopol Center for the Arts Veterans Bldg. 282 High Street	Tuesday 9 am – 2:30 pm Online appts: taxaide.info/ca-sonoma-county	Feb 4 / Apr 8	707-582-3945 or Online
Sonoma	Sonoma Valley Regional Library 755 W. Napa Street	Friday 10 am – 2 pm	Feb 7 / Apr 11	707-996-5217 or in person in library
Windsor	Windsor Senior Recreation Center 9231 Foxwood Drive	Monday 1 – 5 pm (Closed 2/17, 3/10)	Feb 3 / Apr 14	707-582-0251

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Wednesday
January 22
3:30 - 4:30 PM

Understanding and Responding to Dementia Related Behavior

Presented by the Alzheimer's Association



Behavior is a powerful form of communication and is one of the primary ways people living with dementia communicate their needs and feelings as the ability to use language is lost. However, some behaviors can present real challenges for caregivers to manage. Join us to learn how to decode behavioral messages, identify common triggers and learn strategies to help manage the most common behavioral challenges of Alzheimer's disease.

Location: Alzheimer's Day Respite Program

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Space is Limited

Pre-Registration Required

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Crossword

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Word Search

1 F 2 R 3 E 4 E 5 G 6 O 7 O 8 F 9 S 10 K 11 I 12 S 13 S

14 D 15 O 16 O 17 R 18 A 19 C 20 U 21 R 22 A 23 I 24 R 25 I 26 S

27 R 28 E 29 S 30 O 31 L 32 U 33 T 34 I 35 O 36 N 37 L 38 E 39 S 40 T

41 S 42 O 43 L 44 S 45 C 46 U 47 L 48 L

49 S 50 T 51 R 52 E 53 W 54 M 55 O 56 T 57 T 58 S 59 A 60 G 61 E

62 I 63 O 64 U 65 L 66 I 67 B 68 Y 69 A 70 N 71 N 72 N 73 W

74 C 75 O 76 N 77 F 78 E 79 T 80 T 81 I 82 E 83 N 84 D 85 U 86 E

87 L 88 A 89 M 90 E 91 F 92 A 93 W 94 N

95 S 96 T 97 A 98 Y 99 S 100 F 101 A 102 L 103 S 104 E 105 T 106 T 107 O

108 H 109 A 110 T 111 I 112 C 113 I 114 C 115 L 116 E 117 N 118 O 119 W

120 E 121 X 122 T 123 N 124 O 125 D 126 A 127 L 128 O 129 F 130 T 131 E 132 N

133 R 134 O 135 G 136 U 137 E 138 R 139 I 140 O

141 F 142 L 143 A 144 K 145 P 146 A 147 T 148 R 149 O 150 L 151 C 152 A 153 R 154 S

155 D 156 E 157 C 158 A 159 L 160 L 161 O 162 Y 163 D 164 A 165 G 166 E 167 S

168 A 169 T 170 T 171 Y 172 E 173 S 174 T 175 E 176 E 177 L 178 O 179 P 180 E

A K K P W H L S T R E E P Z T O

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A L A C K R Z I T S K N V R E G

Y O R E B Z Q R O O Z B L O Y R

F Z T A N Z F Y T O N J D G V H

SCRAMBLE - "New Year's Resolutions"

1. SIXECREE	E X E R C I S E
2. EANRGID	R E A D I N G
3. VUEOLRENT	V O L U N T E E R
4. ETDTLUCER	D E C L U T T E R
5. TDIE	D I E T
6. EIASPPNSH	H A P P I N E S S
7. ILKGNWA	W A L K I N G
8. YELECRC	R E C Y C L E
9. NEDOAT	D O N A T E
10. RAAMHOTN	M A R A T H O N
11. EVSIDKY	S K Y D I V E
12. ROPLEEX	E X P L O R E

SUDOKU - Medium

5	6	9	3	8	4	2	1	7
1	2	3	7	6	5	4	8	9
4	8	7	9	1	2	6	5	3
9	1	5	4	3	6	7	2	8
8	3	2	1	7	9	5	4	6
6	7	4	2	5	8	9	3	1
2	5	6	8	9	3	1	7	4
7	9	8	5	4	1	3	6	2
3	4	1	6	2	7	8	9	5

SUDOKU - Hard

7	5	3	9	2	6	4	1	8
9	1	2	8	7	4	6	3	5
4	6	8	1	3	5	9	2	7
6	8	5	3	4	2	1	7	9
3	7	4	6	9	1	5	8	2
1	2	9	7	5	8	3	6	4
5	4	7	2	6	3	8	9	1
8	9	6	5	1	7	2	4	3
2	3	1	4	8	9	7	5	6



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For more information about COA programs, call 707-525-0143

Appreciating Valentine's Day

By Jennifer Kulpa, Tellegacy & Lunch Companion Coordinator

The exact origins of Valentine's Day are unclear. Generally, it's believed to have roots in both ancient Roman traditions and Christian history.

Roman Festival of Lupercalia

This ancient Roman fertility festival, celebrated in mid-February, involved rituals of purification, fertility, and matchmaking. It's thought that the Christian Church may have chosen to establish St. Valentine's Day on February 14 to coincide with this pagan celebration and Christianize it.

Christian Martyr

Several early Christian martyrs named Valentine were honored on February 14. One popular legend tells the story of a Roman priest who defied the emperor's order to ban marriages, secretly marrying young couples. He was imprisoned and executed. Another legend suggests he sent a love letter signed "From Your Valentine" to his jailer's daughter.

Today, Valentine's Day is a global celebration of love and affection. Common ways to celebrate include:



Jennifer Kulpa

- **Exchanging Gifts**—This can range from traditional gifts like chocolates, flowers, and jewelry to more personalized presents.
- **Romantic Dinners**—Couples often enjoy special dinners at restaurants or home.
- **Sending Cards**—People exchange cards with heartfelt messages to loved ones.
- **Acts of Service**—Some people express their love through service, such as cooking a meal, running errands, helping with chores, or volunteering with an organization.

Speaking of global celebration, let's explore some unique Valentine's Day traditions worldwide!

Japan

- **Valentine's Day**—Primarily celebrated by women who give chocolates to men.
- **White Day**—A month later, men reciprocate by giving white chocolate or other gifts.

South Korea

- **Similar to Japan**—Women give chocolates to men on Valentine's Day.
- **White Day**—Men return the favor with candy.
- **Black Day**—Single people celebrate their solitude on April 14 by eating jjajangmyeon, a black bean noodle dish.

Denmark and Norway

- People send pressed flowers and humorous poems to their loved ones.

Finland

- Valentine's Day is celebrated as a day of friendship, with people exchanging cards and gifts with friends.

Wales

- St. Dwynwen's Day celebrated on January 25, is considered the Welsh equivalent of Valentine's Day. Men traditionally give women wooden love spoons, often carved with intricate designs.

Mexico and other Latin American countries

- Valentine's Day, also known as El Día del Amor y la Amistad (Day of Love and Friendship), is celebrated by exchanging cards and gifts with romantic partners and friends.

The oldest known Valentine may have been written from prison. In 1415, Charles, the Duke of Orléans, penned a love poem to his wife while imprisoned in the Tower of London. This heartfelt letter, signed "Your Valentine," is considered the earliest Valentine's Day card.

Ultimately, Valentine's Day is a day to celebrate love in all its forms, whether romantic, familial, or platonic. Platonic love is a special type of love. What immediately comes to mind is how our staff and volunteers consistently express their satisfaction in assisting our clients and find great joy in serving their needs.

Let love be your guide, your compass, and your constant companion. Happy Valentine's Day!

Balance Tips for Sonoma County Seniors: New Year, New Goals!

Kyle Rivers, COA Fall Prevention Coordinator

As we usher in 2025, the New Year offers a wonderful opportunity to reflect on how we can improve our health. While many people focus on big resolutions like eating better or exercising more, paying attention to balance is just as important. Balance is crucial for maintaining a healthy, fall-free lifestyle, but it is often overlooked. Maintaining good balance becomes even more vital as we age to prevent falls, boost confidence, and ensure we can continue enjoying the activities we love. In this article, I'll share valuable tips and exercises to help you improve your balance. The exercises can be performed seated or standing. Standing is more challenging.



Kyle Rivers

Prioritize Safety When Practicing Balance Exercises

Keeping yourself safe is essential before starting any balance exercises. Always have a sturdy handrail, chair, or kitchen sink nearby at around waist level that you can grab onto for support. Consider your footwear and the surface you're exercising on—make sure you're wearing non-slip shoes or socks, and try to practice on a carpeted surface for better footing. You might also want to exercise with a partner or "spotter" who can help support you as you practice.



Exercise 1: Tightrope Walk

Stand with your arms extended straight to your sides like a tightrope walker for this exercise. Walk forward straight, keeping your head up and

eyes fixed on a point in front of you. As you become more comfortable, pause briefly (1-2 seconds) each time you lift your back leg off the ground. Continue walking for 10-20 steps before changing direction or taking a rest.

Exercise 2: Boat Rocks



Start by standing with your feet hip-width apart and an even weight distribution on both legs. Keep your shoulders back and maintain good posture. Slowly

shift your weight to one side, lifting the opposite leg off the ground a few inches. Hold the position for 2-4 seconds, then return your foot to the ground and shift your weight to the other side. Repeat this for five reps on each side. As you improve, try holding the lifted leg for extended periods, aiming for up to 30 seconds.

Exercise 3: Angel Wings



Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your arms relaxed at your sides. Raise your heels slightly off the ground, keeping your knee straight. Imagine you

are mimicking the heel-clicking like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz when she says, "There's no place like home." Turn both feet outward (heels pointing away from each other). Then, rotate both feet inward (heels pointing toward each other), simulating the "wings" of an angel flapping open and closed. As you move, lightly tap the heels of both feet together at the peak of the inward motion, just like Dorothy's heel-click. Repeat this "flap" for 10-15 repetitions on each foot, alternating between outward and inward rotation. If you are unable to do this exercise standing, begin seated and practice until you build the strength to perform the movement standing up. As you become more comfortable, perform the movement slowly and with control to engage your ankle muscles more deeply.

Exercise 4: Single-Leg Stands



Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Lift one foot off the ground a few inches to support your weight on just one leg. Hold the position for 5-10 seconds

before switching legs. Aim for 5-10 repetitions on each side. One leg may be easier to balance than the other, which is natural. However, working both sides equally is important to build strength and stability on each leg.

Regular physical activity, such as walking, swimming, or cycling, can help maintain strength and cardiovascular health, which are key to maintaining balance.

Proper hydration and nutrition play critical roles in coordination and concentration, which directly affect balance. Drink plenty of water throughout the day and eat a balanced diet rich in essential nutrients.

You don't need to overhaul your life to improve your balance. Incorporating a few simple daily exercises and being mindful of your environment and habits can significantly improve your stability and reduce your risk of falling. Small, consistent changes over time can lead to a healthier, more balanced future.

Proper footwear is vital to maintaining balance. Choose shoes with good arch support, and avoid high heels or slippery soles that could increase your risk of falling.

Final Thoughts

Improving your balance in 2025 doesn't require significant changes to your daily routine—it's about consistency, safety, and making minor adjustments that will support your health and independence. By following these tips and practicing balance exercises regularly, you'll be on your way to a healthier, more confident year ahead. Here's to improved balance and wellness in the New Year!

Mental Wellness Month and PEARLS—A Year of Making a Difference

By Nyah Reynolds, PEARLS Coach, Council on Aging

January is Mental Wellness Month, and it's the perfect time to share something that we are incredibly proud of here at Council on Aging—the PEARLS Program!

Now over a year old, PEARLS has been helping adults 50 years and older in Sonoma County incorporate ways to reduce depression and social isolation. Since its launch in August 2023, PEARLS has already made a real impact, serving 70 older adults. The short-term, client-driven program helps people build problem-solving skills and increase physical, social, and pleasurable activities.

We've been gathering feedback from participants, and it's been invaluable in helping us understand what makes PEARLS so effective. One participant shared, "I was able to take this overwhelming feeling of unsolvable matters and see a way to solve them. Instead of dwelling on this lack of joy in my life, we were able to find solutions to this lack of joy." Another participant said, "When you're hurting, it's very hard to have a clear mind to know what to do next. My coach supported and helped me take things step-by-step, so I didn't feel overwhelmed." These comments and the research we have collected highlight the positive changes that PEARLS is bringing to older adults in Sonoma County.

How PEARLS Help—Real Results That You Can See

Since the program began in August 2023, we've seen some remarkable outcomes, with 34 participants graduating from PEARLS in its first year. So, what kind of changes have we seen?

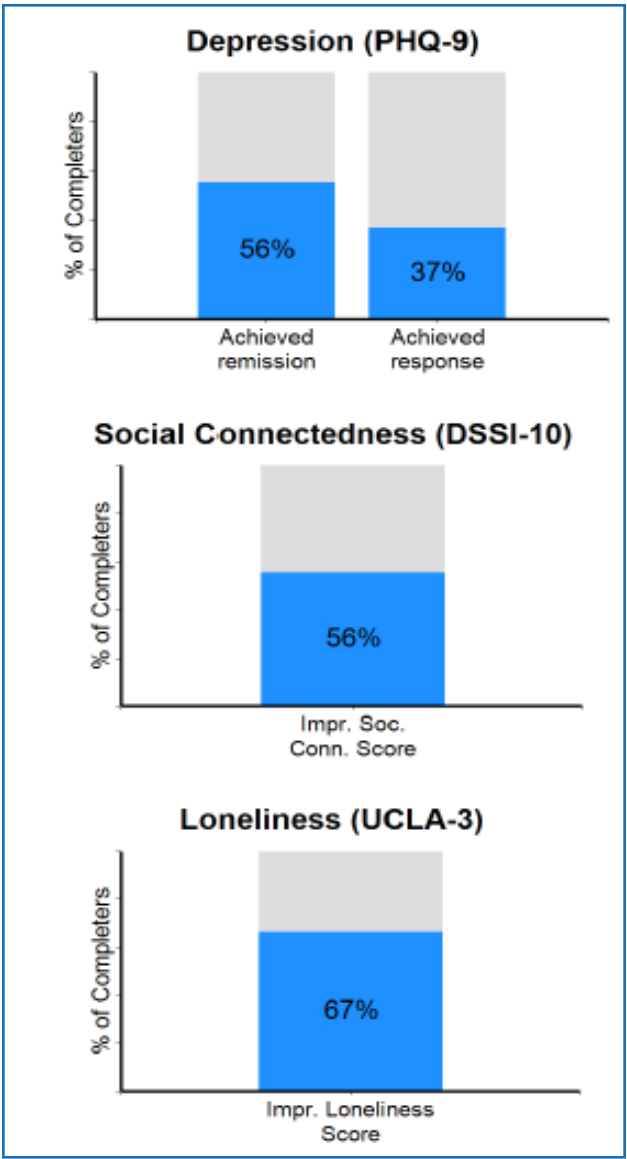
- **Depression:** At the beginning of the program, 84% of participants met the criteria for Major or Minor Depression. By the end of the program, this percentage was half, with only 41% meeting this criterion. We also saw that 37% of participants reported a 50% decrease in depression symptoms by the end of the program. 56% of participants achieved remission, meaning they no longer met the criteria for clinical depression.
- **Social Connection:** 38% of participants improved their social connectedness, and 36% reported feeling less lonely after completing PEARLS.

These results show that PEARLS can be effective in helping people feel better and more connected. But it doesn't stop there—PEARLS also boost physical activity, social interactions, and overall enjoyment of life.

More Active, More Engaged, More Enjoyment

Aside from problem-solving, another key way PEARLS helps reduce depression and social isolation is by encouraging people to be more active and engaged. Here's what we've found regarding participants' activity levels.

- **Pleasurable Activities:** By the end of their PEARLS sessions, 64% of participants reported engaging in more activities they enjoyed, a 10% improvement from the beginning of sessions.
- **Social Activity:** 52% of participants stated they engaged in more social activity, a 10% increase from what was reported at the beginning of sessions.
- **Physical Activity:** By the end of their sessions, 88% of participants were engaging in light physical activity at least once a week, marking a 10% increase. Additionally, there was a 16% rise in participants doing moderate exercise 5 or more days a week.



Strength or flexibility training also saw a 16% increase, highlighting improved overall physical activity levels.

For many older adults, staying active can become a challenge, so seeing these improvements in physical and social activity shows that there are ways for older adults to continue to remain active. With the appropriate support, people can adapt and thrive.

Addressing More Than Just Depression

The PEARLS program isn't just about reducing depression—it's also about improving overall quality of life. We found that while coaches were helping participants with problem-solving and activity planning, they also addressed other critical needs.

- **Healthcare Access:** 15% of participants said their healthcare access needs were addressed during their PEARLS sessions.
- **Food, Transportation, and Financial Stability:** 26% felt these basic needs were addressed.
- **Housing and Living Situations:** 44% reported that PEARLS addressed their housing situation.
- **Social Support & Loneliness:** 68% of participants said PEARLS addressed their loneliness and social support needs during the program.

It's clear that the PEARLS coaches don't just help clients with mental wellness—they take the time to listen and help connect clients with the resources they need to improve their overall lives.

PEARLS Is Here For You

We are so proud of what PEARLS has accomplished in its first year, and we're excited to continue making a difference in Sonoma County. What we believe makes PEARLS unique in helping older adults with their mental wellness is that PEARLS is not therapy, and it's not case management—it's coaching. One client described

this coaching approach perfectly—"This problem-solving structure is the opposite of helplessness. One of the brilliant things about the program was my coach asking me what my goals and resources are, rather than just giving advice or referrals." Another unique aspect is that PEARLS coaches meet clients where they are, whether in their homes, over the phone, at the Council on Aging office, or even out in the community. The main goal is to help each participant build the skills they need to improve their well-being, with practical support tailored to their needs.

Together, we can prioritize mental wellness and continue creating happier lives for Sonoma County's older adults. Once prescreened, candidates are matched with a coach for the eligibility intake within weeks. If you or someone you know might benefit from the PEARLS program, we encourage you to learn more by calling (707) 525-0143 ext. 139, send an email to gramier@councilonaging.com, or visiting <https://www.councilonaging.com/>

Chickpea, Broccoli & Sausage Sheet Pan Dinner

Ingredients:

- 1 15 oz can Chickpeas (Garbanzo Beans) Rinsed & Drained
- 3 TBS Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Divided (1 oz & 2 oz)
- 12 oz Broccoli Florets (or Halved Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Potatoes, Squash)
- 1 12 oz Package Sliced/Cooked Sausage (Your Choice)
- 1-3 Garlic Cloves, Peeled, Smashed, Chopped (to taste)
- ½ Tsp Granulated Garlic Powder
- ½ Tsp Kosher Salt
- ¼ Tsp Black Pepper (Freshly Gound)

Other Seasonings: Feel free to add additional seasonings to complement whatever type of sausage you're using.

Directions:

- Spray a baking sheet with cooking spray and preheat the oven to 400°F or 375°F Convection (preferred).
- In a bowl, toss the chickpeas and garlic cloves with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and seasonings. Spread on baking sheet. (Do not scrape out any seasoning that sticks to the bowl.) Cook 15-20 minutes until lightly browned.
- While the chickpeas and garlic are cooking, using the same bowl as for tossing the chickpeas, add the remaining olive oil and toss the broccoli well.
- To the tossing bowl, add sausage slices and toss lightly.
- Mix the broccoli and sausage well in with the chickpeas and garlic.
- Return the pan to the oven and continue baking until the vegetables are crispy and the meat is browned (about another 15-20 minutes or longer depending on vegetable selections). Serves 4.

C.H.'s Journey through the PEARLS Program

Sunny San Diego was where C.H. was born, but he spent his formative years exploring the beautiful outdoors of Wisconsin. As a young boy, he reveled in the outdoors—swimming in the local lake, riding his bike, and building snow forts and treehouses with friends. However, after the passing of his grandfather, his mother decided to relocate back to California to care of his grandmother. C.H. agreed he would help his mother move to this little town called Healdsburg. He recalls driving through and thinking, "Holy crap, this is beautiful! I love it here!" As a young man who cherished the outdoors, he immediately fell in love with Sonoma County's charm. C.H. flew back to Wisconsin, put in his two-week notice, and never looked back. He quickly became an avid mountain biker in the area, expressing that it "made me feel like a kid again."

As C.H. grew older, he tapped into his artistic side, experimenting with ceramics and photography. He crafted unique ceramic murals, created stained glass art, and captured stunning concert moments, including front-row shots of legends like The Rolling Stones and The Who. Yet, he soon realized that while art was a

passion, it wasn't a reliable way to pay the bills. So, he transitioned to a stable career, working as an administrative assistant for 30 years. After retiring, C.H. embraced a new chapter filled with concerts, the companionship of his dog, a growing CD collection, and a commitment to veganism. However, retirement also brought challenges, including losing friendships and feelings of isolation.

One day, a social worker handed C.H. a flier about the PEARLS program, which piqued his interest with its promise of face-to-face meetings. He discovered that Council on Aging offered additional connecting opportunities, like their Lunch and Learn Program. Eager to rebuild his social circle after losing touch with many friends, C.H. felt hopeful about joining the PEARLS program. PEARLS is a short-term, practical, client-driven program designed to help reduce depression and social isolation through problem-solving skills and increasing physical, social, and pleasurable activities.

Upon graduating from PEARLS this year, C.H. reflected on his experience with his PEARLS coach. "I think the program is a great thing. Some of the best things I got out of the

program were referrals to Drive-Up Pick-Up Meals, learning about the Sebastopol Love Choir, being encouraged to attend, and the support from my coach. "He believes the program is a fantastic resource, particularly for lonely people. "Loneliness is probably the greatest challenge for us old people," he said. "When we retire, all those work friends often move away or stop returning calls. Being able to come and talk to another human—whether planning out activities or working through problems—was the most enjoyable part of the program."

C.H. found that he could be open, honest, and himself throughout the program, and his coach helped him stay focused on his goals, such as riding his bike and making steps towards finding "his people." Since completing PEARLS, he has become physically and socially active, riding his bike solo and with a local club and enjoying the company of new individuals he has met from clubs and social gatherings.

For more information on the PEARLS program, please call (707) 525-0143 ext.139 or visit councilonaging.com

Hearts are made for Breaking

By Joleen D Bishop, MSN, WHNP-BC-MSCP

The new year has arrived, bringing with it all kinds of new beginnings. We've received gifts from the holidays and, perhaps, a new appreciation for eating and drinking less. Perhaps you recently visited your healthcare provider and heard about "heart health." Though the details might not have been entirely clear, you remember that food and exercise are crucial in keeping your heart healthy. Great goals to work toward!

In this new year, let's dive into the basics of heart health. We'll examine risk factors for heart attacks, analyze common symptoms, and explore recommended exercises to help you build strength and stamina. We'll also take a closer look at the anatomy of the heart and the other organs that work together to keep this vital system running at its best. It's time to give our hearts the attention they deserve!

It's overwhelming. The complexity of a simple heartbeat is astonishing. Each beat pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout the body and removes waste through thick muscles, arteries, veins, and valves. The heart has four chambers that help circulate blood—first to the lungs, then to the body. Hormones, proteins, and enzymes trigger electrical impulses, causing the heart to contract.

The heart is electrical and mechanical, and many factors can disrupt its function. Irregularities like tachycardia (fast heart rate), bradycardia (slow heart rate), palpitations (skipped beats), and AFib (irregular beats) can all affect blood flow, leading to symptoms like shortness of breath and fatigue. Some genetic conditions are undiagnosed until later in life.

While I'm not a cardiologist, my work in women's health often uncovered issues like high blood pressure or anemia. I'll share some basic heart health information, and if needed, you can follow up with a cardiologist.

The heart develops early in life, starting around days 21-22 of pregnancy. By week 8, it has four chambers and fully functioning valves and vessels. Over a lifetime, the heart beats around 2.5 billion times.

Many factors can increase the risk of heart disease and heart attacks. Here are key risks,

including those specific to women, transgender people, and people of color, who face unique genetic, hormonal, and cultural challenges.

- **Obesity, Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome:** These conditions pose risks to everyone.
- **Men:** Men typically face a higher risk of heart attack earlier in life, though women's risk increases post-menopause.
- **Women:** In addition to common risk factors (diabetes, smoking, obesity, etc.), women also face unique risks like preterm delivery, hypertension during pregnancy, and breast cancer treatment.
- **People of Color:** African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, and some Asian American groups have higher risks due to obesity, diabetes, and systemic factors like limited healthcare access.
- **Transgender People:** Estrogen use in transgender women may raise heart attack and stroke risks. In contrast, testosterone use in transgender men doesn't appear to increase cardiovascular risk, though it may affect other areas of health.
- **Family History:** A family history of heart disease increases personal risk.
- **Smoking:** Smoking is a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke, increasing the likelihood of clots and plaque buildup. Secondhand smoke also raises the risk.
- **High Blood Pressure and Cholesterol:** High blood pressure increases the heart's workload, risking stroke, heart attack, and kidney failure. Normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg.
- **Alcohol:** Excessive alcohol raises blood pressure. Limit intake to two drinks per day for men and one for women.
- **Cannabis:** Regular marijuana use increases heart disease risk, particularly for those with existing heart conditions.
- **Stress/Anxiety/Panic Attacks:** Chronic stress can lead to high blood pressure, increasing heart attack risk. "Broken heart syndrome," triggered by emotional stress, can temporarily disrupt heart function.

Managing these risks through lifestyle changes and medical guidance is key to reducing heart attack risk.

Common symptoms of a heart attack include chest pain, pressure, squeezing, or fullness, often accompanied by shortness of breath. In women, pain may radiate to the neck, jaw, throat, upper abdomen, or back. Subtle symptoms can include nausea, fatigue, lightheadness, or dizziness. If you experience any of these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.

To promote heart health, managing weight, diabetes, and blood pressure is key. Reducing alcohol and cannabis use is also important. These are modifiable risks with great benefits.

Discuss healthy eating, exercise, and stress management with your provider. Many health systems offer programs to help with modifiable risks. You can start simple, like walking for 5 minutes daily and gradually increasing your activity.

American Heart Association Exercise Recommendations

- Aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week or 75 minutes of vigorous activity (or a mix of both).
- Include muscle-strengthening activity (resistance or weights) at least 2 days a week.
- Reduce sitting time; even light activity can offset the risks of being sedentary.
- For additional benefits, aim for 300 minutes (5 hours) of activity per week.

In writing this article, I aim to create awareness around the risks presented in our lives that we may not connect directly with heart disease or heart attack. Treatment or mitigation of risks is basically weight management, chronic health management, food, and other substance moderation. The specifics of these improvements are best discussed with your provider, as they have your specific medical records to refer to. I wish you a healthy and Happy New Year.



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