

CHRONIC ISOLATION LEADS TO MORE THAN BOREDOM:

It Can Actually Harm Your Health

Feeling lonely on a regular basis can take a toll on your overall health. With so much of our lives becoming more digital, it has become easier to get stuck in our own little worlds, and this can lead to chronic isolation. This can have a damaging effect on physical and mental health, leading to a variety of issues, including depression, anxiety and even serious health complications.

Read on to discover how to make meaningful social connections with others that will have a lasting positive impact on your mental, physical and emotional health.

Become a Volunteer

Volunteering has a plethora of benefits and greatly impacts our well-being. Among others, volunteering provides the following significant benefits:

- A sense of purpose – it provides an opportunity to engage in meaningful activities and connect with people in the community, helping to reduce social isolation
- A socially conscious activity that your family and friends can also share in
- An opportunity to try new things and explore new interests
- A sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, which leads to improved mental well-being
- The opportunity to help those in need and a chance to make a positive difference in the lives of others – this reduces feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Increased physical activity, which helps reduce stress, anxiety and depression



Volunteer Opportunities Within Cook County

The Forest Preserves of Cook County volunteers include youth, adults, retirees, nature lovers, people who want to build job skills, people looking for a new experience, people who want to experience nature with a welcoming group – and everything in between

VolunteerMatch matches inspired people with inspiring causes. It's how volunteers and nonprofits connect to achieve remarkable outcomes



Attend Networking Events

Networking events and activities are a great way to make social connections. They can help you make professional contacts, expand your social circle, and provide you with opportunities to develop your professional and personal interests. Make sure to attend networking events that are relevant to your interests and industry, and those that are relevant to the people with whom you would like to connect.

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Join Online Support or Social Media Interest Groups

Online groups offer members a safe space to share experiences, feelings and coping mechanisms with others who are also experiencing the same. Joining an online group can provide a sense of community and belonging that may be lacking in other aspects of your life. If there's an interest, there's a group for it! From groups for caregivers to groups for gardeners, there are many ways to connect with others. Be sure to research a group before joining so you're aware of what's expected from the experience. For a list of specialized support group resources, please visit [Mental Health America](#).



Connect on Purpose

The best way to stay connected is to do so intentionally and conscientiously. It doesn't matter if you connect with one person or with many. If you desire to make connections and for some reason you find it difficult, it may be time to speak with your primary care provider, therapist, or contact your [EAP](#) provider who will help you work through whatever is getting in your way. The more we take care of ourselves, the more likely it is that we'll make room in our lives for others to do the same.



MYHEALTH STORY SPOTLIGHT: HONORABLE TRACIE R. PORTER, CIRCUIT JUDGE



In college, I was a Track and Field athlete. My event was the long and triple jump. I didn't know that the joint-jarring landings were injuring my knees and hips. Many years after college, I would still be suffering the aftereffects.

After undergoing four laparoscopic surgeries, two on my right knee and one on each hip, I was still in pain. A diagnosis of osteoarthritis also revealed that my hip joints were deteriorating.

My health success story began when I listened to my body and promised myself that I would no longer ignore my pain. I made a commitment to myself that I would be proactive and find the right health plan and physician.

I connected with a bright and compassionate surgeon who listened and realized that, at 50 years old, my quality of life should not be compromised, and my pain should not just be masked with drugs. Other surgeons thought I was too young for hip replacement surgery, but my newly found physician performed replacements on both hips – four months apart! My recovery went well because of his skills and that of competent physical therapists. My medical team of nurses, occupational and physical therapists all nurtured me back to health.

I now have a quality of life that allows me to walk without pain or medications, to exercise without restrictions, to even run if I choose, and to live a happier life that gives me hope for a healthier future.