



# Get Connected!

## A Guide to Becoming Engaged in the Community



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
HEALTH AND HUMAN  
SERVICES AGENCY



LIVE WELL  
SAN DIEGO

## About this guide

This resource is brought to you by the Age Well San Diego Social Participation Team. Age Well teams are comprised of older adults and representatives from a variety of community organizations. The teams are coordinated by the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Aging & Independence Services. To learn more about Age Well San Diego and how it fits into the County's comprehensive framework on aging services, the Aging Roadmap, visit [www.livewellsd.org/agingroadmap](http://www.livewellsd.org/agingroadmap).

To learn more about programs and services for older adults and persons with disabilities, visit [www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov](http://www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov) or call (800) 339-4661.

*The information on the effects of social isolation in this handbook was gathered from a variety of sources. Please refer to the references section at the end of the book for more details.*

# Introduction

## Benefits of Social Connection

Feeling a sense of connection and belonging is important for all of us and can positively impact our health. Individuals with strong social ties live longer and are healthier than those with weak social ties. Our relationships encourage us to take better care of ourselves, try new things, and develop a sense of purpose. Yet maintaining relationships can be hard when we are sheltering in place, live far from family, experience health issues, lack transportation, or are busy caregiving for others.

## Social Isolation vs. Loneliness

Social isolation is defined by measurable factors like the size of a person's social network and access to transportation. Loneliness is based on how your level of social connection makes you feel. You can feel happy with just a few friends, and you can feel lonely despite having many friends.

### Who is Affected?

One in three U.S. adults age 45 and older report feeling lonely. Unpaid caregivers, low-income individuals, and those identifying as LGBTQ are at increased risk of loneliness. Other factors that may impact loneliness include having a small social network, losing a spouse, being physically isolated, and poor health. In San Diego County in 2012, 46% of older adults agreed that isolation negatively impacted their quality of life.

**If you feel lonely. . .**

***you are not alone in  
your loneliness.***



## What You Can Do

Most people benefit from maintaining and building social connections. This guide provides strategies to help you get connected, whether you feel lonely, want to build connections to prevent loneliness, or are trying to help someone you know become more socially connected.

# How Social Connection Impacts Your Body

## Social Isolation

Impaired cognition  
(fuzzy thinking)  
Depression, anxiety  
Poor sleep

Increased risk of  
heart disease

Compromised  
immune  
system

Weight gain  
or loss

Increased  
cortisol (stress  
hormone)  
released from  
kidneys

Inflammation

## Social Connection

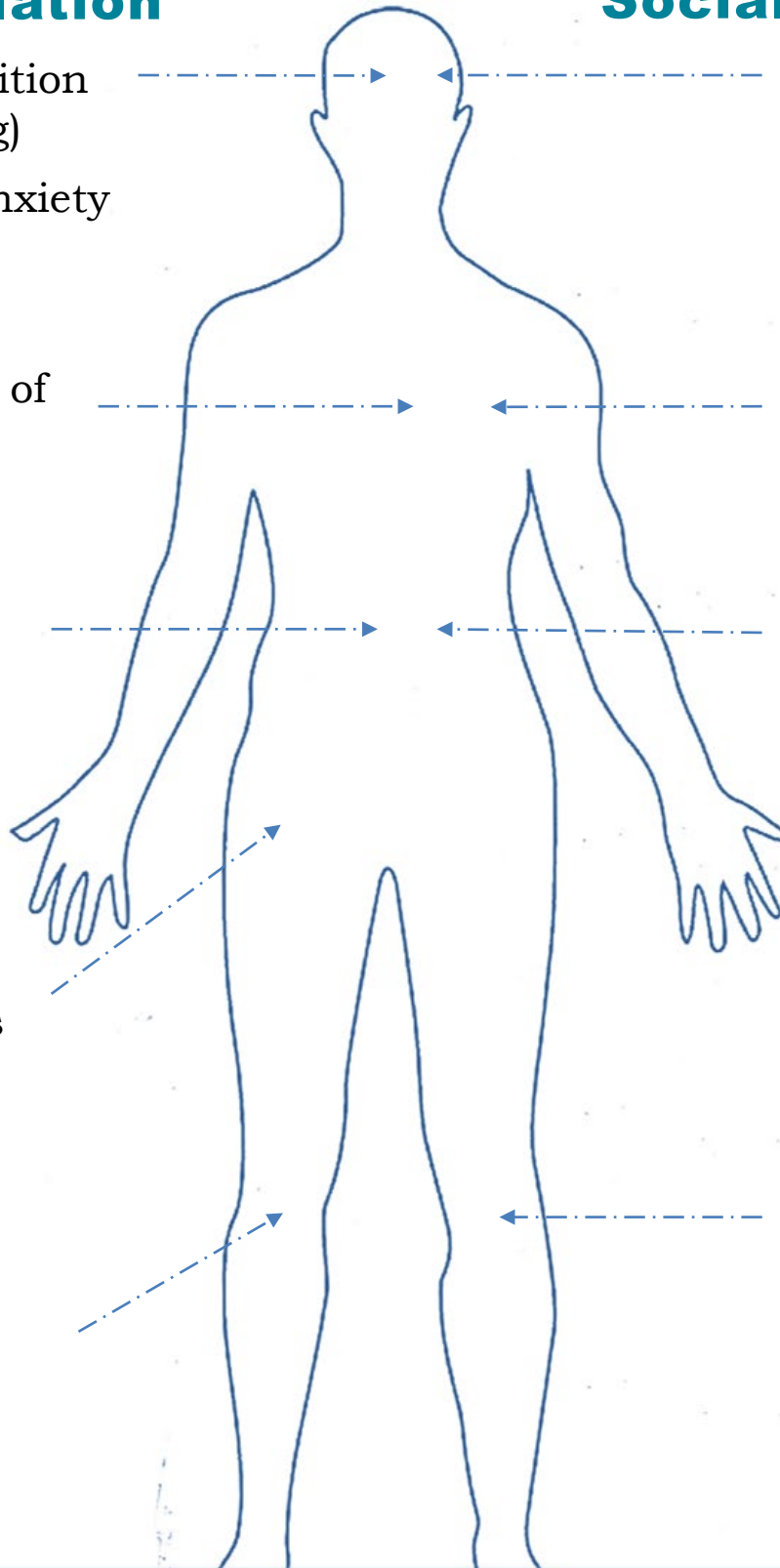
Improved  
cognition (clear  
thinking)  
Happier mood  
Improved sleep

Stronger  
heart

Better  
immune  
function

Weight  
maintenance

Decreased risk  
of rheumatoid  
arthritis



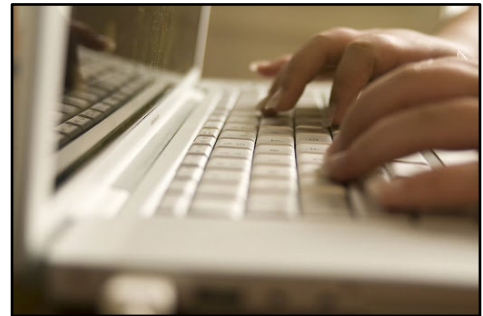
Loneliness and social isolation can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day.

# First Steps

It can feel intimidating to take your first steps toward becoming more connected. Here are some simple actions you can take to get connected.



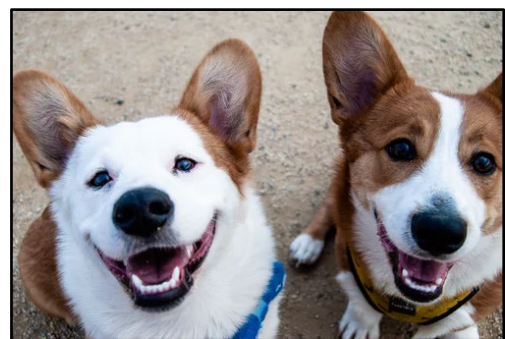
Take an online class and learn something new.



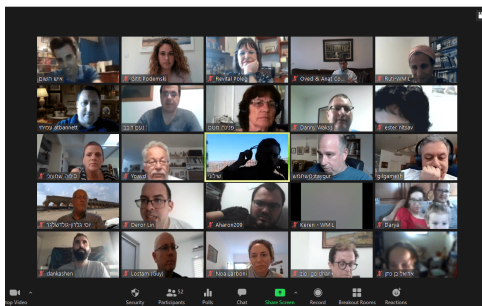
Play online games with friends and loved ones.



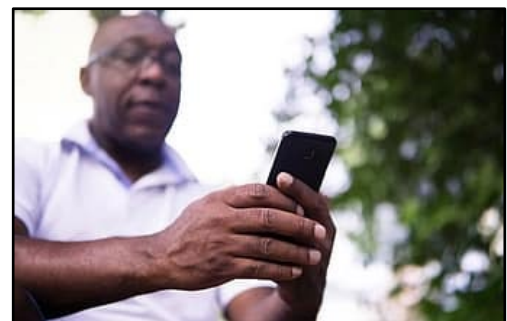
Schedule a virtual coffee or tea date with with a friend.



Consider adopting a pet.



Learn about technology you can use to make video calls.



Find virtual volunteer opportunities and make an impact in your community.

# Overcoming Challenges

## Challenge

## Suggestions to Overcome

*“I have an illness or disability.”*

- Research support groups for your illness or disability.
- Include a family member or caregiver when trying a new activity.
- Choose activities from the “Ways to Engage” list in this guide.

*“I don’t have transportation.”*

- Call FACT Transportation Services at (888) 924-3228.
- Ask a household member or friend for a ride and invite them to the activity!

*“I don’t know anyone in my community.”*

- Consider communities you might be overlooking (church, neighbors, support groups, volunteer groups).
- Call loved ones who are far away.

*“I worry that people won’t accept me.”*

- Remember you’re not alone in feeling this way!
- Talk to someone about these fears.
- Ask a family member or caregiver to join you.

*“I’m embarrassed of how I’ve aged.”*

- Remind yourself that everyone is aging!
- Connect with people who are at your life stage.
- Realize that with age comes knowledge and valuable experiences to share with society.
- Practice gratitude and find joy in things you can still do.

# Ways to Engage

## Resources and Ideas



## Educational Opportunities

### Libraries

County Libraries: [sdcl.org](http://sdcl.org)

858-694-2415

City of San Diego Libraries: [sandiego.gov/public-library](http://sandiego.gov/public-library)

619-236-5800

Some other local cities have their own library systems. Find your local library and explore their online events and current borrowing policies. Some libraries will deliver books to your home!

### San Diego Oasis

619-881-6262

Virtual fitness, art, and educational opportunities:  
<https://san-diego.oasisnet.org/>

### Open University

Online classes: [calstate.edu/extension](http://calstate.edu/extension)

562-951-4880

### OSHER Lifelong Learning Institute

Online and in-person classes.

Cal State San Marcos: [csusm.edu/el/olli](http://csusm.edu/el/olli)

760-750-4020

San Diego State:

[ces.sdsu.edu/osher-lifelong-learning-institute-sdsu](http://ces.sdsu.edu/osher-lifelong-learning-institute-sdsu)

619-594-2863

UC San Diego: [extension.ucsd.edu](http://extension.ucsd.edu)

858-534-3409

## **Covia Well Connected**

Education, support, and friendly conversation over the phone or online: [Covia.org/services/well-connected](http://Covia.org/services/well-connected) 877-797-7299

## **Selfhelp Virtual Senior Center**

An online community for seniors!  
<https://bit.ly/2hTCOne>

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

### **Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)**

858-505-6399

Administered by Aging & Independence Services, RSVP can connect you to more than 90 community organizations in need of volunteers. Serve in law enforcement, health care, education, the arts, and more. Virtual opportunities available!

### **Interfaith Community Services**

760-489-6380

Safe and virtual volunteer programs that support the underserved in San Diego's North County:  
[interfaithservices.org](http://interfaithservices.org)

### **Helping Older Adults**

Provide transportation, friendly calls, or home repair as a volunteer at a local nonprofit:

ElderHelp: [elderhelpofsandiego.org](http://elderhelpofsandiego.org)

619-284-9281

Jewish Family Service: [jfssd.org](http://jfssd.org)

858-637-3210

### **Volunteer Match**

Search for volunteer opportunities based on your interests: [VolunteerMatch.org](http://VolunteerMatch.org)

### **Big Brothers Big Sisters San Diego**

Virtual volunteer mentorship program for youth:  
[sdbigs.org](http://sdbigs.org)

858-536-4900

### **RARE Bear Program (Rare Science)**

Sewing volunteers make bears for children:  
<https://bit.ly/2P8MJCT>





## Health, Fitness, and Nature

### **Parks and Recreation**

County Parks & Recreation: [sdparks.org](http://sdparks.org)

858-565-3600

City of San Diego Parks & Recreation:

619-236-6905

[sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation](http://sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation). Other local cities may have recreation departments for you to explore as well.

### **Feeling Fit Club**

858-495-5500

Fitness classes for older adults on TV, DVD, or online:

[HealthierLivingSD.org](http://HealthierLivingSD.org)

### **Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance**

800-495-5500

Free classes for all levels: [HealthierLivingSD.org](http://HealthierLivingSD.org)

### **Senior Centers**

800-339-4661

Many senior centers offer meals for pick-up, virtual fitness classes, and other remote activities. To find a senior center near you, call Aging & Independence Services.

### **Wheelchair Dancers**

858-573-1571

Free adaptive online dancing classes and programs for all ages: [wheelchairdancers.org](http://wheelchairdancers.org)

### **Live Well @ Home**

This free resource provides tips and strategies to stay healthy in both mind and body. Resources are organized by age group and topic. [Click here](#) for Live Well @ Home.

## Transportation

### **Facilitating Access to Coordinated Transportation (FACT)**

Transportation for seniors and individuals with disabilities: [FactSD.org](http://FactSD.org)

888-924-3228

### **Regional Bus, Rail, and Paratransit**

Metropolitan Transit System: [sdmts.com](http://sdmts.com)

619-233-3004

North County Transit District: [gonctd.com](http://gonctd.com)

760-966-6500

### **Ride Well to Age Well Guide**

This guide provides updated information about transportation resources around San Diego County. It includes a resource list organized by region, technical guides, and a transportation glossary.

[Click here](#) for the guide.

## Technology Tutorials

### **DOROT Technology Guides**

Dorot, a nonprofit organization, created new Tech Guides that are available for public use. They contain step by-step instructions on how to teach seniors to use their smartphone to check email, FaceTime, text, and more. <https://bit.ly/3hID70K>

### **Teaching Technology to Older Adults**

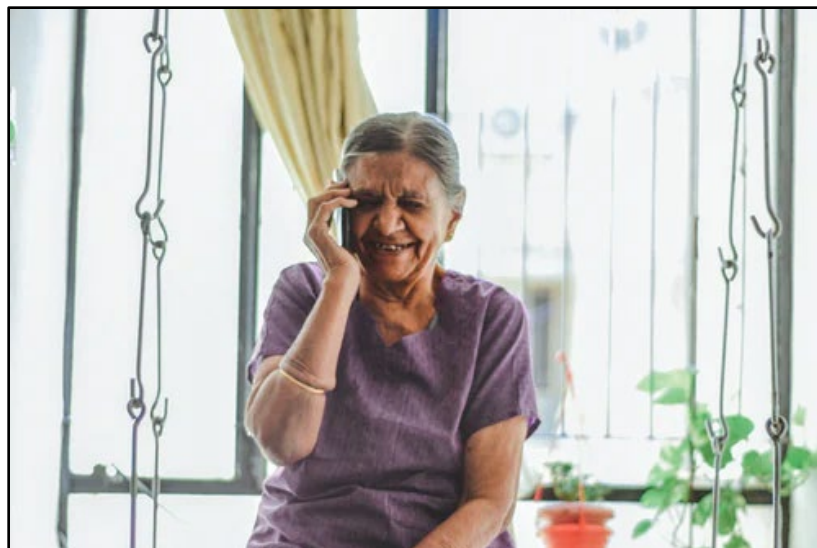
This article describes how to help an older adult get online, learn new technology, and navigate the online world of food and prescription delivery, telemedicine, and entertainment.

<https://bit.ly/2YNJk3W>

### **Staying home, staying connected**

This resource guide from Front Porch Communities and Services helps older adults engage and connect through technology. The easy-to-use resource has suggestions for how you can use technology to engage in a wide range of interests, like aeronautics, crafts, cooking, health, entertainment, and more.

<https://bit.ly/3lutvsJ>



## Services to Help You Connect

### **California Phones**

800-806-1191

Free devices that make it easier to hear, dial, and call: [www.californiaphones.org](http://www.californiaphones.org)

### **Clear Captions**

866-868-8695

Calls captioned for free: [www.clearcaptions.com](http://www.clearcaptions.com)

## Home Meal Delivery

### **Aging & Independence Services**

800-339-4661

Aging & Independence Services (AIS) offers home-delivered meals to qualified individuals through contracted organizations. To learn more about meal delivery, call the AIS Call Center. The AIS website also has information about many community food resources, including how to use popular food delivery apps and more: [www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov](http://www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov).

### **Meals on Wheels San Diego County**

800-5-SENIOR

Daily meal delivery for seniors throughout the county: <https://www.meals-on-wheels.org/>

## Daily/Regular Check-Ins

### **You Are Not Alone (YANA)**

Home visits for seniors who live in communities served by the San Diego County Sheriff and the San Diego Police Department. Contact your local station to enroll.

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### **ElderHelp- RUOK?**

Daily phone calls for San Diego seniors.

619-284-9281

### **AgeWell Services Social Call List**

City of San Diego offers daily phone calls for San Diego seniors. Calls made 8:00-11:00am, M-F. Para Español call 619-236-6905.

619-236-6910

### **Always in Touch**

Daily check-ins and weekly socialization calls:  
[www.always-in-touch.com](http://www.always-in-touch.com)

855-710-2255

## Mental Health Services

### **NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)**

Connect with a trained crisis counselor to receive free crisis support 24/7 by texting NAMI to 741-741.

### **San Diego Access and Crisis Line**

Experienced counselors are available 24/7 to provide you with a referral to meet your needs and determine eligibility.

888-724-7240

### **The Friendship Line**

Accredited crisis line for people aged 60 and older. Also serves as a “warm line” for non-emergency support calls.

800-971-0016

**For more resources  
call 2-1-1**

# Caregiver Social Connections



According to the National Family Caregivers Association, 91% of caregivers have feelings of loneliness and isolation. If you feel alone, you are not alone in your loneliness!

## Tips for Caregivers

- Ask for help from friends and family members.
- Schedule regular breaks to engage in self care.
- Join an online caregiver support group.

## Organizations for Caregivers

### **Southern Caregiver Resource Center**

800-827-1008

Free education & training, respite care, and support for caregivers: [caregivercenter.org](http://caregivercenter.org)

### **Alzheimer's Association**

Free education, volunteer opportunities, and caregiver support groups: [www.alz.org/sandiego](http://www.alz.org/sandiego)

### **Alzheimer's San Diego**

Free education, volunteer opportunities, and caregiver support groups: [www.alzsd.org](http://www.alzsd.org)

### **San Diego Caregiver Coalition**

858-505-6300

Community organization offering caregiver support, education, and advocacy: [caregivercoalitionsd.org](http://caregivercoalitionsd.org)

# Help Loved Ones Get Connected



The following phrases can help start a conversation to encourage loved ones to get connected:

- “I’m going to try (insert activity), would you like to join me?”
- “You’ve always been interested in \_\_\_\_\_. Let’s sign you up for a virtual class!”
- “We haven’t seen \_\_\_\_\_ in a while. We should set up a video call!”

## Conclusion

It can take courage to reach out to others and try new things when you’re feeling lonely or socially isolated. The first steps can feel intimidating, but you are not alone. It is important to remember that becoming socially connected is beneficial to your health and well-being. Giving back to your community, connecting with loved ones, or trying something new are a few of the many ways to share who you are with the world, and remember that you are valued.

## Acknowledgments

This guide was created by the Age Well San Diego Social Participation Team. Special thanks to Age Well student interns, Shannon Hennessy and Théo Gallegos, for their research, content, and design contributions.

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