From the community:

Loneliness may trigger heart disease, stroke

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People who are socially isolated may face a 30 percent higher risk of [heart disease](http://www.chicagotribune.com/topic/health/diseases-illnesses/heart-disease-HEDAI0000026-topic.html)and stroke than those who are socially connected, according to a recent study. This level of influence on heart health is on par with other risk factors such as anxiety and job stress.

"Addressing loneliness and social isolation could have an important role in the prevention of two of the leading causes of ill health and mortality worldwide," said lead researcher Nicole Valtorta, a research fellow in the department of health sciences at the University of York, in a news release.

The study, published in the journal Heart, does not prove that loneliness and social isolation caused heart problems or strokes, only that there is a link between them.

The researchers collected data from 23 previously published studies involving over 180,000 adults, more than 4,600 of whom had heart attacks, chest pain or died, and more than 3,000 who had suffered strokes.

"I would have to agree that there is a correlation with loneliness and depression and how it can promote heart disease and stroke," says Che Estrella, a stroke coordinator and cardiac telemetry educator at Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital in Barrington, Ill. "There are plenty of support groups that can help people overcome loneliness."

It's a challenge getting people who are lonely and isolated to realize this is a contributing factor and to make an effort to interact with others, she says. Being able to use tools like the Internet, Facebook and other social media may make it easier for people to connect.

"Given that the effect of social connections on risk for heart disease, stroke and death is equivalent and, in many cases, exceeds that of other factors, such as light smoking, obesity, high blood pressure and air quality, we need to start taking social connection seriously for our health," said Julianne Holt-Lunstad, an associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at [Brigham Young University](http://www.chicagotribune.com/topic/education/colleges-universities/brigham-young-university--OREDU0000451-topic.html), in an accompanying journal editorial.