**How loneliness really CAN kill you: Feeling isolated 'raises risk of a stroke or heart attack by a third'**

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Loneliness increases the risk of a heart attack or stroke by almost a third, according to research.

The effect of social isolation is similar to that of anxiety or work-related stress, according to a major review of the evidence.

British scientists analysed data on more than 181,000 people and found being lonely and isolated raised the chance of heart disease by 29 per cent and stroke by 32 per cent.

Campaigners last night called for urgent action to tackle the 'silent epidemic' of loneliness among the elderly. More than half of over-75s live alone – and about 1 million Britons are thought to suffer loneliness.

Experts have long warned social isolation takes a severe toll on mental health and wellbeing, but this is the largest study to have shown it has a dramatic impact on physical health.

The scientists, from the universities of York, Liverpool and Newcastle, examined 23 studies. Of the 181,000 patients involved, 4,628 suffered heart disease and 3,000 had a stroke.

Writing in the Heart medical journal, the authors said: 'We found an association between poor social relationships and incident cardiovascular disease comparable in size to other recognised psychosocial risk factors, such as anxiety and job strain.

'Tackling loneliness and isolation may be a valuable addition to coronary heart disease and stroke prevention strategies. Health practitioners have an important role to play in acknowledging the importance of social relations to their patients.'

Researcher Nicole Valtorta, of York University, said: 'We take risk factors like obesity and physical inactivity for granted whereas we don't yet with social isolation and loneliness. The data supports us taking it seriously.'

Dr Kellie Payne, from the Campaign to End Loneliness, said: 'The effect of loneliness and isolation on mortality exceeds the impact of well-known risk factors such as obesity and cigarette smoking and this research helps to highlight yet further the need for loneliness to be treated as a serious public health issue.

'Loneliness is becoming a silent epidemic in our society. It's the responsibility of our community as a whole to tackle it.'

Izzi Seccombe, of the Local Government Association, which represents councils, called for loneliness to be seen as a public health issue.

She said: 'With more than 1 million people aged over 65 believed to be suffering from loneliness, councils with their responsibility for public health see this as a major concern. In the past it may have been treated as a trivial matter, loneliness is a serious condition that can severely affect a person's mental and physical wellbeing.

'Loneliness is an issue that needs our urgent attention, and something that will become an increasingly important public health concern as people live longer lives.'

Caroline Abrahams, of Age UK, said: 'Not only does loneliness make later life unbearably miserable – as this research shows, it's awful for our health too. The Government must recognise loneliness and isolation in later life as the serious health hazards they are, and work with others, including charities and the NHS, to tackle them. That said, everyone can help by being a better friend and neighbour.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3548825/Being-lonely-raises-risk-stroke-heart-attack-Findings-lead-campaigners-demand-action-tackle-silent-epidemic-elderly.html#ixzz4BkvJvanF>   
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