Loneliness increases heart disease and stroke risk as isolation is bad for both physical and mental health

* 23:30, 19 APR 2016
* **BY** [MARTIN BAGOT](http://www.mirror.co.uk/authors/Martin_Bagot/)

## The research by three UK universities found being socially isolated can affect the heart in a similarly negative way as anxiety or a stressful job

Being lonely can significantly increase your chances of having [heart disease](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/heart-disease) or a stroke, new research suggests.

The study found the effect of being socially isolated has on the heart is similar to that seen in people who suffer anxiety or have stressful jobs.

Researchers examined 23 studies, involving more than 181,000 adults, where 4,628 coronary heart disease and 3,002 [strokes](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/stroke) were recorded.

They found that loneliness and isolation were associated with a 29% increase in risk for coronary heart disease and a 32% increase in risk of stroke.

Izzi Seccombe, spokeswoman for the Local Government Association, said: “With more than one million people aged over 65 believed to be suffering from loneliness, councils see this as a major concern.

“In the past, it may have been treated as a trivial matter but loneliness is a serious condition that can severely affect a person’s [mental](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/mental-health) 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.”

The studies were reviewed by researchers from the [University of York](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/university-of-york), the University of Liverpool and Newcastle University who published their findings in the journal Heart.

It 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.

“Our findings indicate that efforts to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke could benefit from taking both loneliness and social isolation into account.

“Health practitioners have an important role to play in acknowledging the importance of social relations to their patients.”

A linked editorial in Heart recommended that health workers should inform patients of the importance of social interaction “as part of a [healthy lifestyle](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/healthy-lifestyle) ”.

Medics Dr Julianne Holt-Lunstad and Dr Timothy Smith said more research needs to be done in to the impact of social interaction online.

It said: “With such rapid changes in the way people are interacting socially, empirical research is needed to address important questions.

“Do social relationships/interactions via technology have a similar influence on health and well-being?”

They added: “Given projected increases in levels of social isolation and loneliness in Europe and North America, medical science needs to squarely address the ramifications for physical health.

“Similar to how cardiologists and other healthcare professionals have taken strong public stances regarding other factors exacerbating cardiovascular disease (eg, smoking, diets high in saturated fats), further attention to social connections is needed in research and public health surveillance, prevention and intervention efforts.”