

# "Hey, Alexa": Voice assistants may curb loneliness in older adults who live alone

January 21 2022, by Scott Schrage

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

People of all ages use personal voice assistants—Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri, among others—for information and entertainment. But they hold particular value in old age, when declining eyesight and dexterity

can make voice-activated technology an appealing alternative to screen-based, hand-controlled devices.

Research has begun examining another benefit that older users, especially those living alone, might gain from personal [voice assistants](#): relieving loneliness.

Nebraska's Valerie Jones and colleagues conducted a pilot study in which 16 adults—all at least 75 years old and residing alone in an independent living facility—used an Amazon Echo device for eight weeks. For the first four weeks, when participants were asked to use the Amazon Echo at least five times a day, they averaged 18 daily interactions with the device. Later, when free to interact with the Echo as little as they pleased, they still used it 10 times a day.

Participants reported feeling less lonely after four weeks with the Echo, averaging a 1.99 on a 5-point loneliness scale, down from 2.22 before the study. Over eight weeks, their interactions with the Echo also revealed indicators of anthropomorphism—ascribing human qualities to a non-human entity:

- Greeting the Echo with a friendly phrase (e.g., "Good morning")
- Addressing the device in the second person (i.e., "you") while asking questions or making comments
- Using polite language (e.g., "please") when speaking to the device
- Replying to Alexa's responses (e.g., "That's very good")

The lonelier a person reported being prior to the study, the more often they greeted the Echo with friendly phrases. Those friendly greetings also correlated with greater reductions in loneliness.

Future research should seek a larger sample and include a control group,

the researchers said. But such findings could inform the design of "gerontechnology" aimed at older adults.

Provided by University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Citation: "Hey, Alexa": Voice assistants may curb loneliness in older adults who live alone (2022, January 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-hey-alexa-voice-curb-loneliness.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.