

Lack of friend or family visits is associated with increased risk of dying

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Never being visited by friends or family is associated with an increased risk of dying, according to [a study](#) published in *BMC Medicine*. The authors suggest that their findings could be used to help identify patients

at a higher risk of dying due to social factors, and to develop more effective interventions to combat the increased risk of death associated with social isolation.

Although previous research has identified associations between deaths due to any causes and both a "sense of loneliness" and living alone, the combined impacts of different types of [social interaction](#) on [mortality](#) has been unclear.

Hamish Foster and colleagues used data from 458,146 adults recruited to UK Biobank to investigate the association between mortality and five types of social interaction. Participants were recruited between 2006 and 2010 and had a mean age of 56.5 years.

The participants completed a questionnaire on recruitment, during which they answered questions about five types of social interaction: how often they were able to confide in someone close to them and how often they felt lonely (subjective measures); and how often they were visited by [friends](#) and family, how often they participated in a weekly group activity, and whether they lived alone (objective measures).

After a median 12.6 years follow-up, 33,135 of the participants had died based on linked [death certificates](#).

The authors found that all five types of social interaction were independently associated with mortality from any cause. Overall, increased mortality was more strongly associated with low levels of the objective measures of social interaction compared to low levels of the subjective measures. The strongest association was for individuals who were never visited by friends or family, who were at a 39% associated increased risk of death.

Furthermore, the benefit of participating in weekly group activities was

not observed in participants who never had friends or family visit—participants who never received visits but did join group activities had a comparable associated increased risk of death to those who had no visits and joined no activities (50% and 49% respectively). However, participants who received friend or [family](#) visits on at least a monthly basis had a significantly lower associated increased mortality risk, suggesting that there was potentially a protective effect from this social interaction.

The authors caution that although the overall strength of association is likely to be generalizable, the sample data from UK Biobank is not fully representative of the general UK population, and that the social interaction measures they assessed were self-reported and relatively simple. The authors suggest that further research could investigate the effects of other types of social interaction on mortality, or explore how much change in a type of interaction is needed to best benefit socially isolated people.

More information: Hamish M. E. Foster, Social connection and mortality in UK Biobank: a prospective cohort analysis, *BMC Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12916-023-03055-7](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-023-03055-7).
[www.biomedcentral.com/articles ... 6/s12916-023-03055-7](https://www.biomedcentral.com/articles...6/s12916-023-03055-7)

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