

Alone but not lonely: How solitude boosts well-being

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New research from the University of Reading sheds light on the complex relationship between time spent alone and mental health. The study, published in [Scientific Reports](#), reveals that solitude has both benefits and costs for well-being.

Researchers tracked 178 adults aged 35 and older in the UK and US for up to 21 days. Using daily diaries, the team recorded time spent alone versus interacting with others. Participants also reported daily measures of [stress](#), [life satisfaction](#), autonomy, and loneliness.

The results showed there was no clear optimal balance between [solitude](#) and social time; there was no such thing as spending the 'right' number of hours in solitude. Spending more hours alone was linked with increased feelings of reduced stress, suggesting solitude's calming effects.

A day with more time in solitude also related to feeling freedom to choose and be oneself. However, greater solitude was not all good. On days with more hours spent alone, people also reported feeling lonely and less satisfied, highlighting potential effects of social isolation. In all, everyday solitude had both beneficial and harmful relationships with well-being.

Less stress

Importantly, the [negative impacts](#) were reduced or nullified when solitude was motivated by [personal choice](#) rather than enforced by external factors. Individuals who spent more time alone overall did not report feeling overall lonely or less satisfied, but the benefits remained. People who spent more time alone reported less stress.

Professor Netta Weinstein, from the University of Reading's School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences, was the lead author of the study.

She said, "The enforced lockdowns of the pandemic highlighted many of the long-lasting impacts that can occur when we are starved of interaction with other people. Yet this study highlights some of the benefits that solitude can bring. Time alone can leave us feeling less

stress and free to be ourselves."

"This study highlights that spending time alone can be a healthy, positive choice, and that there is no universal level of socialization or solitude to aim for."

The authors suggests that with thoughtful use, solitude may promote wellness, but forced isolation can risk loneliness and dissatisfaction. Choosing solitude and using it intentionally for its benefits may be key to balancing solitude amid the demands of modern life, they say.

More information: Netta Weinstein et al, Balance between solitude and socializing: everyday solitude time both benefits and harms well-being, *Scientific Reports* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-023-44507-7](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-44507-7)

Provided by University of Reading

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