

Physical distancing, social distancing and what it's doing to our health

1 April 2020, by Cami Buckley



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Julianne Holt-Lunstad has spent her entire career studying the influence of social relationships on physical health. Her work has been pivotal in the recognition of social isolation and loneliness as risk factors for early mortality.

Through her years of study and research, Holt-Lunstad has provided expert testimony in a US Congressional Hearing, provided recommendations for the US Surgeon General Emotional Well-Being in America Initiative was a member of the scientific advisory committee for the UK Cross Departmental Loneliness Team. Holt-Lunstad has advised governments and organizations across the world on how to address this issue.

As individuals are facing this worldwide pandemic and are physically distancing themselves from others, Holt-Lunstad's biggest concern is that with this pandemic there will be a greater sense of social disconnection than ever before.

"If we don't change this trajectory, we will have emerging health issues beyond this pandemic,"

Holt-Lunstad said.

Holt-Lunstad's research and expertise has been in high demand especially as of late, as social isolation is taking its toll across the world. Science, The New Yorker, The Atlantic, The New York Times, The Guardian, Insider and NPR are just a few of the media outlets who have looked to her to help their audiences recognize the importance of staying socially connected while being physically distant.

Holt-Lunstad studies the biological pathways that help explain how our relationships influence physical social health as well as the long-term [health](#) effects of being more or less socially connected.

Her research has included data from more than 3.4 million participants worldwide and examines the effects of social isolation, loneliness and living alone on risk for premature mortality. She's found that loneliness increases risk for earlier death by 26%, social isolation by 29% and living alone by 32%.

"What my research has also shown is that when we looked across the myriad of ways in which we can connect to people socially, perceptions of support increased odds of survival by 35%," Holt-Lunstad said. "This suggests that even the mere perception of the availability of support can go a long way in helping not only our emotional well-being but our [physical health](#)."

Holt-Lunstad's hope is that throughout this pandemic there will be a greater awareness of the importance of being socially connected, and that we will see the extent to which we really do need to rely on others.

"It's important to recognize ways to still maintain social connections while being physically distant," Holt-Lunstad said. "We need to show others that

we are available."

Some suggestions of ways to still stay socially connected to others right now include:

- Phone calls
- Texts
- Emails
- Video messaging
- Messaging via social media platforms
- Playing digital games with friends via apps
- Start an online book club with friends
- Host a watch party online with friends
- Start an online exercise group with friends
- Look for service opportunities online
- Write letters

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if instead of feeling more isolated than ever that we felt more connected than ever, just by really connecting to each other t

Provided by Brigham Young University

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