



The Experts Agree: Social Interaction is the Key to Good Health for Older Adults ***Retirement community living is one way to combat loneliness, experts say***

For many, alone time is a valued state, but being alone and being lonely are much different and the latter may have serious health repercussions particularly for older adults.

According to many experts in geriatrics, older adults spending their retirement years in their current homes can result in growing isolation and loneliness. Most researchers define loneliness as feeling left out or isolated or lacking companionship – even if a person is married or living with a partner.



“The reality is that that remaining in your home can result in growing isolation and loneliness in later life,” said Ken Dychtwald, PhD, psychologist, gerontologist, best-selling author and CEO of Age Wave. “Senior living options, like a continuing care retirement community (CCRC), offer opportunities to create new friendships and social connections.”

According to Dychtwald, friendships and close social connections are an essential source of happiness, and people age 60 and over are most likely to cite “family and friends” as extremely important to their happiness – more important than money or even health. These friendships and social connections can be found not only at CCRCs but at various types retirement communities.

And when it comes to health, a study by geriatricians at the University of California, San Francisco confirms that “older adults who feel isolated and unhappy are twice as likely to have declining abilities to perform so-called activities of daily living.”

Furthermore, a study by Brigham Young University researchers published in the *Journal of PloS Medicine* reports that “having low social interaction is as bad for your health as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, is as dangerous as being an alcoholic, is as harmful as never exercising, and is twice as dangerous as obesity.”

The good news is that communal situations like living at a retirement community, offers residents greater social interaction. They offer residents the opportunity to try new

hobbies, pursue existing passions and give them access to lifelong learning opportunities, specialized exercise programs, communal dining, access to off-site group excursions and more.



In fact, University of Florida researchers surveyed 157 retired women in Florida 55 and older about their leisure activities, according to a *Bio-Medicine* online article. They found the common stereotype of seniors playing bingo groundless, as only 4 percent of the women surveyed played the game. Handiwork also did not emerge as a leading hobby.

In reality, among popular activities were bicycling, gardening, tennis, swimming, golf, exercise classes, talking on the telephone, watching television. The study found that the women surveyed found retirement a chance to finally do things their way, and there was a sense of freedom from homemaking and child care.

The Brigham Young University study states and Dychtwald agrees that it is not uncommon for people who stay in their current home during post retirement to find that their friends and family move away, and many can feel increasingly lonely or isolated in their current home.

According to the BYU report, residents of CCRCs say that it is the opportunity to meet, learn from, and engage in new activities with positive, stimulating, like-minded people that can make life brighter and fuller. Said one interviewee in the report: “The No. 1 benefit is that you’re surrounded by successful, interesting people. You have a pretty good chance of finding people who may make an impact on your life.”

In addition, the report said, residents often describe the staff as an “extended family,” which, together with visits from family and opportunities to meet family members of other residents, helps to create a dynamic, multigenerational social environment.

CCRCs offer independent living with a combination of a private residence, services, amenities and care including assisted living, memory support care and skilled nursing care.

“Not all retirement communities offer the same opportunities, so research is essential, but if you find the right one, you can be as active as you would like to be and engage in meaningful social opportunities,” said Joan Woodworth, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Front Porch, one of Southern California’s largest non-profit providers of senior housing. “Today’s retirement communities offer unique, interesting and fun pursuits that can lead to meaningful connections.”

About Front Porch

Front Porch is one of the largest not-for-profit providers of retirement living communities in Southern California. Front Porch active adult and full-service retirement communities offer a full range of options from independent living to continuing care, along with specialized programs like memory support. With innovative communities and programs that meet the changing needs of people as they age, Front Porch communities represent a leading-edge approach to wellness in aging. Front Porch is comprised of 11 full-service retirement communities in California and two adult living communities: one in Louisiana and one in Florida. Of these, six are Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC). Front Porch, based in Burbank, Calif. and founded in 1999, is a not-for-profit organization that gives back to its residents and the communities it serves.

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