



PHOEBE MINISTRIES

Friendships and Seniors

Contributed by Chris Woolston, M.S. HealthDay: News for Healthier Living

At any age, loneliness is a curse. And for older people, a lack of a social life can even be hazardous to their health. People who don't get out much often succumb to depression, a condition that in turn makes them vulnerable to many illnesses, including heart disease, alcoholism, diabetes and, perhaps, cancer.

Socializing extends your life

But just as loneliness can destroy a person's life, socializing can save it. In a 13-year study of almost 3,000 senior citizens, Harvard researchers found that social activities such as playing bingo or attending church may be just as important to survival as regular exercise. That's right: When it comes to adding years to one's life, bingo is right up there with jogging!

Seniors get more out of socializing than just a few extra years of life. Friendships and activities reduce stress, help people feel worthy and needed, and stimulate the mind. According to a report in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, strong social contacts offer powerful protection against the mental declines that often go along with aging. And having strong friendships can also add years to one's life. A Spanish study published in the journal *BMC Geriatrics* in 2007 found that having a confidant was linked to a 25 percent less risk of dying prematurely than an elderly person without a strong friendship.

It just takes a little effort to cash in on the benefits of friendships. Getting involved in local activities, attending church or volunteering are just a few ways for seniors to increase their socialization and engagement. And when you laugh, reminisce and share in the company of others it eases the impact of difficulties that life may throw your way!