Social Changes

Loneliness is a common problem for many older adults. Retirement and loss of family and friends can lead to loneliness.

Loneliness is not just related to living alone.
• Lack of frequent communication may be more important than being alone.
• Someone who lives with others, but does not have frequent communication, may be lonelier than someone who lives alone and has frequent communication.

Loneliness can affect food intake by causing:
• Loss of appetite.
• Decreased desire to cook and eat.

Loneliness can also lead to poor eating habits:
• Eating the same foods.
• Snacking instead of eating meals.
• Eating easily prepared foods.

Emotional Changes

Although not a problem for all, depression is a problem for many older adults.
• Loneliness, retirement, and loss of family and friends can cause depression.
• Some medicines and some nutrition deficiencies can also cause symptoms of depression.

Depression can also affect food intake by causing:
• Loss of appetite.
• Decreased desire to grocery shop, cook or even eat.

Tips if Social and Emotional Changes Affect Food Intake

• Ask friends or family over for meals.
• Ask friends and family to eat out.
• Senior meal sites provide a place to eat with others.
• Some medicines can cause depression. Check with your doctor about the medicines you use.

**Tips for Caregivers if Social and Emotional and Changes Affect Food Intake**

• Serve food so it looks pleasing. Food tastes better if it looks good to eat.
• Meals with a variety of food flavors, colors, temperatures and textures are more pleasing.
• Don’t serve the same foods day after day.
• Make the setting pleasant. Try colorful tablecloths, placemats or trays, music or a centerpiece.
• Have older adults help plan and prepare meals.
• Help older adults to get involved in other activities to increase feelings of worth.
• Watch for signs of loneliness and depression.

Sources