An Outward Mindset: Good for Your Health?

Recent research suggests that a new health crisis is now upon us. Thankfully, it's not the bubonic plague making a fatal comeback. Rather, it is something much more ubiquitous: loneliness.

The Loneliness Epidemic

Studies suggest that loneliness is on the rise among Western countries. For the U.S. in particular, **a study released in 2012** found that between 20 and 43 percent of American adults over age 60 suffered from "frequent or intense loneliness." In the United Kingdom, over 9 million British adults **reported** being "often or always lonely."

With this information, nations are now taking action. A minister of loneliness, Tracey Crouch, has been appointed in the UK and tasked with carrying out the recommendations of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness. In Japan, an **industry emerged** to clean up after "lonely deaths"— in which people lie dead in their apartments for a long time until they are discovered. In the U.S., former Surgeon General, Vivek H. Murthy, is **speaking out** about a loneliness epidemic in the workplace.

Such attention given to loneliness is not without cause.

Several [adverse health effects](#) are associated with loneliness. Among them are high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease, attributed, in part, to higher levels of cortisol, the "stress hormone." Reduced immunity is another potential consequence of loneliness, along with inflammation and poor sleep. Finally, loneliness is thought to put people at risk for premature mortality.

Human Connection Can Add Years to a Life

What's interesting is that complementary research suggests that social cohesion doesn't just reduce the risk of premature mortality—it can even prolong life!

Researcher [Susan Pinker](#) set out to learn why the population of Sardinia, an Italian island in the Mediterranean, had 10 times as many centenarians as North America. She discovered that genes accounted for only 25 percent of their longevity, while the other 75 percent could be attributed to their lifestyle. But what exactly about their lifestyle helped them live to be 100? Social integration and face-to-face contact. In contrast to loneliness, which can lead to adverse health effects, face-to-face contact releases several chemicals that ultimately protect people in the present and into the future.

An Outward Mindset: A Benefit to Work…and Possibly Health, Too!

With an outward mindset, we see others as people. We become alive to the challenges they might be facing, along with their objectives and aspirations. In turn, we come to understand that they matter just like we matter. When we implement an outward mindset, silos are broken down. We become aware of others and of our impact on them. We want to be cooperative and collaborative for the overall goals we are working toward

as an organization. In short, we become socially integrated.

Thus, the above research hints that the social integration and human connection fostered by an outward mindset could be more than a work benefit. It could be a health benefit, too. Or, as Susan Pinker says, "Like the Sardinian villagers, it's a biological imperative to know we belong."

In fact, an outward mindset could benefit work and health at the same time. In his statements on the loneliness epidemic, Murthy, former Surgeon General, suggests that changes in the workplace should be a focus when combatting loneliness. He states,

> *Many people feel that the folks they're working with are work colleagues, but they wouldn't call them friends…And there's a real lost opportunity there, because when people have strong connections with the people they're working with that can not only improve productivity and the overall state of the company, but it can also improve their own health.*

To Improve Inner Health, Try Turning Outward

The benefits of an outward mindset are many—and using it to potentially improve health can be another. So persevere in adopting an outward mindset. It could be your elixir of life!