PREGNANCY

Prolonged Social Distancing and Isolation Increases the Risk of Dementia

Dr Parmi Tripathi*

* *Correspondence: Dr Parmi Tripathi*

Received: 04 March 2025 **Published:** 05 June 2025 **Volume 12, Issue 2** (Apr–Jun 2025)
Article no.: e132 **Open access** · free to read

Dementia

Dementia is a neurological condition that leads to memory loss (cognitive impairment) and causes decline in ability to perform daily activity. It affects estimated 60% people worldwide and commonly observed in elderly patients. At present 50 million people are living with Dementia and incidence of 10 million is being reported every year. Although not common part of aging process, various lifestyle and genetic factors plays crucial role in developing dementia in later stages. The condition is caused by multiple neurological diseases that causes irreversible loss of nerve damage leading to impaired memory function. Initially the condition starts with short term memory loss and as the disease advances, it leads to long term memory loss and in worst case, bedridden or death.

What are signs and symptoms of Dementia

- Memory loss
- Changes in personality
- Loss of understanding the directions, Loss of spatial abilities or forgetting the directions while driving
- Difficulty at finding words
- Difficulty at planning daily work
- Poor motor coordination
- Confusion
- Disoriented
- Difficulty at performing complex tasks
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Agitation
- Hallucinations

Stages of Dementia

Dementia is irreversible and progressive in nature. Till date no cure is available and approved treatment helps manage the symptoms. It eventually progresses to worsen the condition. Clinically, it is categorized in three stages i.e. Early, Moderate and Later stages:

Early stage: Signifies mild dementia. Individuals may have mild impairments in memory, judgment, and problem-solving abilities that affect their daily functioning but are still able to perform basic self-care activities.

Mid stage: Represents moderate dementia. At this stage, cognitive and functional impairments become more evident and interfere with daily activities, including personal care, financial management, and maintaining social relationships.

Late stage: Denotes severe dementia. Individuals may have significant cognitive and functional impairments that render them dependent on others for most aspects of daily living. They may have severe memory loss, language difficulties, and difficulties with mobility.

Long term social distancing & Isolation increases the risk of Dementia

Social distancing and isolation have been reportedly associated with not only increased in risk of dementia but with other condition as well such as depression, heart disease, anxiety and Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's Disease etc. Social Distancing is identified as lack of social interaction or physical closeness. Standalone social isolation increases the risk of dementia by 60%. As an adversity due to covid-19, people have now been more directed towards use of digital platform leading to rise of virtual interactions rather than encouraging physical social interactions. Social distancing has negatively impacted elderly patients more than younger ones.

One of the adverse outcomes of prolonged social distancing/isolation is suffering from loneliness. Long term loneliness itself increases the risk of dementia and have been prevalent amongst all diversity. Handful of studies have demonstrated that brain scan of patients suffering from loneliness showed altered brain volume and increased white matter injury (the area of brain plays critical role in communication, learning and coordination function). These pathological changes serve as biomarker and maps the vulnerability to develop dementia in near future. In addition, people who are following social isolation are also likely to develop other condition such as depression, anxiety, blood pressure and diabetes. They were also likely to increase smoke and be less physical active. Low social participation, less frequent social contacts and more loneliness increases the likelihood of memory decline and may contribute to serious neurological conditions.

Overcome "Modifiable Risk Factor" of Social Distancing and Isolation to delay Dementia

Increased socialization & networking has been associated with increased quality of life for people with existing dementia as well as for prevention of condition. It is necessary to keep up with people and share your thoughts timely to avoid absolute isolation followed with loneliness. Loneliness alone contributes severely towards induction of dementia. Social isolation and dementia are highly intertwined and connected. Isolation can contribute to dementia whereas dementia can also increase social isolation by two-fold. In either case, being socially active becomes evitable. Though the link remains complicated, social isolation and distancing is regarded as modifiable risk factor. Engaging in social activities helps built resistance towards cognitive decline. As per sizable studies, networking size, frequency of networking and interactions reduces the risk of dementia.

Engaging in leisure activities categorized as physical, cognitive and social activities have shown positive improvement in cognition. Various activities such as active listening, be in connection with family and friends, more physical activities such as sport, community/support groups, cognitive behavioral therapy, engaging in relaxing activities have been found to be helpful and reduces the likelihood of cognitive decline.

The pathophysiological reason is not clearly elucidated but it has been reported that improved social interactions helps generate new neural pathways and strengthen the existing ones. It reduces stress, anxiety and promotes release of brain derived neurotrophic factors (BDNF) that improves overall brain health. Overall social engagement strengthens brain function and imparts cognitive stimulation. Henceforth along with leisure physical and mental activities , diverse and quality networking strengthens the overall mental health and protects from serious neurological conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's commonly observed in later stages of life.

Conclusion

With changing current trends of shifting more towards digitalization, there is sharp decline in social engagement and in-person interactions which are otherwise proven to be healthy for a great mental health. Digitalization has led to social distancing and isolation making us more vulnerable to conditions like dementia. With the strong correlation of prolonged social isolation & cognitive decline, it is evident that to increase the diverse networks, frequency of in-person interactions to improve mental health. This will not only helps to reduce stress and

anxiety but also protects from some major neurological complications. To conclude, enriched diversified quality networking stimulates cognitive functions and enhances social abilities

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

How to cite this article (Vancouver)
Tripathi P. Prolonged Social Distancing and Isolation Increases the Risk of Dementia. CHEARS Chronical. 2025;12(2):e132. Available from:
https://chears.in/journal/volume-12/issue-2/prolonged-social-distancing-and-isolation-increases-the-risk-of-dementia-132
Published in CHEARS Chronical.
https://chears.in/journal/volume-12/issue-2/prolonged-social-distancing-and-isolation-increases-the-risk-of-dementia-132