

Next Chapter Notes

Holiday Edition!

A Newsletter for those in
pre-retirement or retirement

“Meta-Communication”: Understand It and Avoid More Conflicts

I like your new shirt ... I think...” Meta-communication refers to the underlying messages a person conveys beyond their actual words. It reflects how something is said—tone, body language, timing, and other cues. You notice it when the emotional message feels different from what was stated. While it is not always negative, addressing it early can prevent misunderstandings, stop conflicts from escalating, and protect morale. If you grew up where vulnerability was discouraged or authentic communication was rare, you may use meta-communication more often and detect it more readily—and sometimes even expect it when it isn’t there. Feeling frustrated by mixed signals? Sensing tension with a coworker? If you are struggling with too many conflicts in your life, talk with a therapist to get guidance. They can help you sort out what you’re experiencing and identify the next healthy step for maintaining positive workplace relationships.



Social Drinking Pressure and Safe Holiday Travel

None of us like feeling vulnerable to social pressure, especially when avoiding alcohol before a long drive. But it takes more than willpower. Holiday parties that include an influential colleague, friends, family, strong group norms, or simply the expectation to “join in,” can weaken your resolve and make drinking harder to wave off. Add a bit of “end of the day” fatigue, stress, or that end-of-the-week desire to relax, and you’re suddenly underestimating your level of impairment at the end of the evening. Planning ahead is far more effective than relying on moment-to-moment judgment trying to fight these challenges. Choosing a designated driver, arranging a rideshare, or one of the best-ever ideas—bringing a non-alcoholic beverage to keep in hand—will reduce social pressure and help you stay in control of your decisions.



www.niaaa.nih.gov/health-professionals-communities/core-resource-on-alcohol/basics-defining-how-much-alcohol-too-much

Create a Healthy Boundaries Checklist

If December feels overwhelming, consider creating a “healthy boundaries checklist.” More than a set of tips, it’s a simple “flight plan” to help you navigate the season with greater ease. Boundaries protect four things: time, energy, finances, and emotional well-being. If anticipating the holidays brings anxiety, you may fear one of these areas stretches you too far. Decide which events you’ll attend and which you’ll skip. Set limits on travel, gatherings, dinners out, and gifts. Build in downtime to decompress. Limit conversations that trigger emotional conflict, especially with family. Which boundary will you commit to this season for more calm and control?



Should You Participate in ‘Dry January’?

“Dry January”—originally a United Kingdom tradition—encourages people to abstain from alcohol for the month of January. The practice was inspired by concerns about frequent holiday drinking. Alcohol abstinence can bring noticeable benefits, including better sleep, increased energy, improved mood, less depression, and healthier weight management. These benefits overlap with those experienced by people recovering from alcohol use disorder (AUD). If alcohol is a concern, talk to your doctor before stopping drinking suddenly, as withdrawal can pose serious health risks and may even require medical supervision. If you are concerned your drinking has become problematic—meaning it negatively affects your life—contact your PCP or substance abuse professional for a confidential assessment. These professionals can provide guidance, resources, and support tailored to your needs, helping you determine whether alcohol use indicates a potential AUD and offering strategies to support your progress toward sobriety.

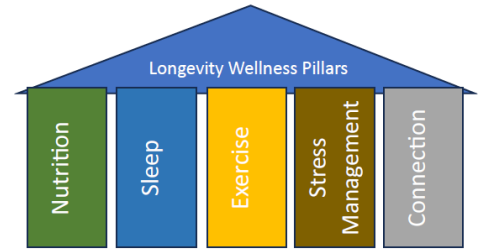


Five Stress Tips for the Holidays

Financial stress is a common holiday challenge. Many spend with abandon and use denial in the short term knowing that the bills will come due after January 1. To reduce or avoid this stress, consider these foundational tips: (1) Lock in on a budget. Stick to it. In doing so, you will be surprised at how easily you prioritize spending on special people, items, and events and easily ignore compulsive spending. The average consumer spent \$282 per month on impulse buys in 2024! (2) Make a gift list and prioritize it. Don't wander through the mall looking for gifts. Instead, sit, think, and explore gift idea sources. A good one is [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com), where individual users present millions of the best-of-the-best ideas. (3) Don't wait until the last minute to buy a gift. Being rushed and anxious can cause you to throw price consciousness to the wind and grab anything just to be done. (4) Turn your budget into cash (and safely store and guard it) or a prepaid debit card (even better) and use it for the holiday season. You will continuously be conscious of its balance and increase your chances of avoiding overspending. (5) Search now for seasonal events and community opportunities that cost little or nothing, and spend the time with a special someone—it can mean more than a costly gift.



Wellness Pillars: Loneliness or Connections during the Holidays



The October 2025 Next Chapter Notes began providing information on the Longevity Wellness Pillars with a focus on Nutrition. This issue, in part because it's the Holiday Season, focuses in on **Loneliness and Connections**.

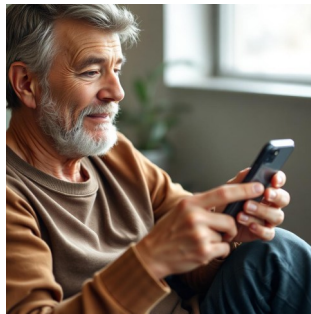
The American Psychological Association's latest *Stress in America*™ survey showed that societal division is a significant stressor for many U.S. adults, suggesting loneliness and emotional disconnection have become a defining feature of life in America. The survey, conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of APA among more than 3,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and older — 62% reported societal division as a significant source of stress in their lives. Beyond this concern about societal division lies a deeper, more pervasive emotional strain: loneliness. Half or more of adults reported feeling emotionally disconnected, saying they have felt isolated from others (54%), felt left out (50%), or have lacked companionship (50%) often or some of the time. While the holidays are a time for joy and togetherness, for many, they can also spur feelings of loneliness. Loneliness and social isolation reduce longevity because it increases the risk for premature death by 26% and 29% respectively. Overall, 80% of adults with high levels of loneliness said they live with a chronic illness, compared with 66% of those with moderate loneliness levels and 68% with low loneliness levels. The 1923 Surgeon General's report on loneliness states that lacking social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day!

What are the options you can explore to reduce your or others' feelings of isolation? **Volunteering:** Approximately 20% of seniors participate in volunteer work. According to a study by the Corporation for National and Community Service, volunteering can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. **Social Clubs and Groups:** About 30% of older adults participate in social clubs or groups. Research indicates that seniors involved in these activities report higher satisfaction and lower rates of loneliness. **Educational Classes:** Participation in lifelong learning programs or community education classes is popular, with around 15% of seniors engaging in such activities. A study by Osher Lifelong Learning Institute found that these classes help build social connections, decreasing loneliness.

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The "Attention Economy" Wants You!

Where is your attention going? Michael H. Goldhaber, a physicist and futurist, wrote about "The Attention Economy" in 1997. His argument: human attention, like time, is a limited resource, easily grabbed and manipulated. Being aware of the attention economy can help you improve focus, be more intentional with decisions, and stay in control amid daily digital bombardment. Not managing your attention can leave you vulnerable to interruptions, scattered thinking, and reduced productivity. So awareness is your first power, but it's a continually developing skill. The first step is recognize and understanding that your attention is what market forces seek to influence. Your decisions, values, and sense of what matters most all are targets. Recognizing this gives you pause, allows refocusing, and enables choices rather than being pulled into a vortex of agendas. Feeling in control gives you the satisfaction of directing your attention where you want.



Physical Activities: Regular exercise, such as walking, yoga, or joining a fitness class, is embraced by about 25% of older adults. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that physical activity boosts mood and social interaction. **Creative Arts:** 18% of seniors pursue arts and crafts activities, including painting and knitting. Engaging in creative expression can foster social bonds and reduce feelings of loneliness. **Digital Engagement:** Approximately 50% of seniors use social media or video calls to connect with loved ones, which can provide an essential lifeline to combat loneliness, especially during the holidays.

These statistics highlight the positive impact of social engagement and activities in reducing loneliness and isolation among seniors. Participating in a combination of these activities can improve physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and enhance quality of life.

Resources:

Meals on Wheels: This program not only delivers meals to seniors but also provides social interaction. Reports indicate that about 2.4 million seniors receive meals through this program annually, with many benefiting from the companionship during meal delivery.

AARP Connect2Affect: AARP's initiative aims to address senior loneliness through resources, awareness, and community events. While specific participation rates are not quantified, the program reaches thousands of seniors through its online platform and events.

Senior Corps: A program by the Corporation for National and Community Service, Senior Corps, engages older adults in volunteer roles that foster community connections. Approximately 200,000 seniors participate in this program each year, helping to mitigate feelings of isolation.

National Council on Aging (NCOA): Provides resources to address loneliness among seniors and promotes social programs across the country. Their initiatives reach hundreds of thousands of older adults annually through outreach and educational programs.

Friendly Voice: This program, part of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, connects seniors with volunteers who provide friendly phone calls. While specific participation numbers vary, many seniors across the U.S. benefit from this regular contact, reducing isolation.

Here to Stay: Aimed at enhancing social connections, this program by the National Institute on Aging focuses on community engagement strategies that have shown positive results. Participation rates are generally not specified, but efforts are made to involve diverse groups of seniors.

Local Senior Centers: Many communities have local senior centers that offer programs, classes, and social activities. Participation can vary widely, with some centers serving hundreds of seniors regularly.

These programs illustrate a national effort to address senior loneliness, promoting social engagement and support networks that can significantly improve the quality of life for older adults.

To find the **local Area Agency on Aging (AAA)** in your area, you can call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116. This is a free service that can help you connect with your local AAA, where you can get information about resources and support for older adults, including programs to combat loneliness and develop new connections.

Personally, I volunteer with the **FSS Group** (Foundation Senior Services) on its Leadership and Advisory Council. Among the Foundations many programs is the [Get a Call Companion - Foundation for Senior Services](#). Seniors can sign up to receive regular phone calls from a Foundation volunteer, which provide a simple yet meaningful way to "check-in" and build companionship – a much needed relationship to the many people facing isolation and loneliness.

Sources:

American Psychological Association "Stress in America 2025 A Crisis of Connection."

"Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation" The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, 2023

This article was created with the assistance of OpenAI's AI Assistant, which helped generate content.



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