

Frequent internet use by older people during lockdown linked to mental health benefits

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A new study from the University of Surrey has found that among people aged 55 to 75 more frequent use of the internet was beneficial for mental health and quality of life under lockdown. Those who used the internet more, particularly for staying in touch with friends and family, were at lower risk of depression and reported a higher quality of life.

Loneliness and [social isolation](#) have been major problems for many under [lockdown](#), and for older people in particular. Loneliness raises risk of [depression](#) and other negative health outcomes. In a paper published in the journal *Healthcare*, researchers from Surrey investigated whether more frequent internet use in older people helped reduce this risk.

Researchers studied 3,491 individual participants drawn from the English Longitudinal Study of Aging in Summer 2020, whilst social distancing

measures were in place across the country.

Participants were surveyed on the frequency and type of their [internet](#) usage—such as information searching or for communication purposes.

Those who reported using the internet frequently (once a day or more) had much lower levels of depression symptoms and reported higher quality of life compared to those who used the internet only once a week or less. Using the internet for communication was particularly linked to these [beneficial effects](#), suggesting that going online to stay connected with friends and family helped combat the negative psychological effects of social distancing and lockdown in adults aged 55-75.

Conversely, the study found that people who mostly used the internet to search for health-related information reported higher levels of depression symptoms. This might be due to a greater degree of worry triggered by reading COVID-19 and other health-related internet sources.

Dr. Simon Evans, lecturer in neuroscience at the University of Surrey, said: "As social restrictions continue during the COVID-19 pandemic, older people are at greater risk of loneliness and [mental health](#) issues. We found that older adults who used the internet more frequently under lockdown, particularly to communicate with others, had lower depression scores and an enhanced quality of life. As the COVID-19 situation evolves, more frequent internet use could benefit the mental health of older people by reducing loneliness and risk of depression, particularly if further lockdowns are imposed in the future."

More information: Anna-Stiina Wallinheimo et al. More Frequent Internet Use during the COVID-19 Pandemic Associates with Enhanced Quality of Life and Lower Depression Scores in Middle-Aged and

Older Adults, *Healthcare* (2021). DOI:
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