

# Men's loneliness linked to an increased risk of cancer

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A recent study by the University of Eastern Finland shows that loneliness among middle-aged men is associated with an increased risk of cancer. According to the researchers, taking account of loneliness and social relationships should thus be an important part of comprehensive health care and disease prevention. The findings were published in *Psychiatry Research*.

"It has been estimated, on the basis of studies carried out in recent years, that [loneliness](#) could be as significant a health risk as smoking or overweight. Our findings support the idea that attention should be paid to this issue," Project Researcher Siiri-Liisi Kraav from the University of Eastern Finland says.

The study was launched in the 1980s with 2,570 [middle-aged men](#) from eastern Finland participating. Their health and mortality have been monitored on the basis of register data up until present days. During the follow-up, 649 men, i.e. 25% of the participants, developed cancer, and 283 men (11%) died of cancer. Loneliness increased the risk of cancer by about ten per cent.

This association with the risk of cancer was observed regardless of age, socio-[economic status](#), lifestyle, sleep quality, depression symptoms, body mass index, heart disease and their risk factors. In addition, cancer mortality was higher in cancer patients who were unmarried, widowed or divorced at baseline.

"Awareness of the health effects of loneliness is constantly increasing. Therefore, it is important to examine, in more detail, the mechanisms by which loneliness causes adverse health effects. This information would enable us to better alleviate loneliness and the harm caused by it, as well as to find optimal ways to target preventive measures."

**More information:** Siiri-Liisi Kraav et al, Loneliness and social isolation increase cancer incidence in a cohort of Finnish middle-aged men. A longitudinal study, *Psychiatry Research* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113868](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113868)

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

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