4 Risks of Isolation in Alzheimer’s Patients

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Alzheimer's and Isolation: What Are the Risks?

Alzheimer's and isolation are huge contributing factors for increased mortality risk among seniors.

Researchers suggest that this could be due to feelings of being forgotten and taken for granted. Another study also reveals that older adults who are isolated and lonely face a higher risk of having poor mental and physical health.

This is why aging in place is not for everybody. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines aging in place as, "the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level."

It may mean lower monthly costs in contrast to staying in an assisted living facility, but the costs of being lonely, isolated and failing health are dangerous. Careful and thorough planning must be done if a senior wants to age in place.

Below are just a few of the many reasons why aging in place may increase an Alzheimer's patient's risk for isolation.

1. The Fear of Getting Injured

Statistics show that falls remain the number one cause of fatal injury among seniors. Experiencing a fall can change an older adult’s life in a moment. An injury caused by a fall can have a great impact on a senior’s life.

This is why many seniors develop a strong focus on avoiding falls. They are aware that as they age the chances of falling increase. Their weakening muscles contribute to the increased risk, not to mention issues with blood pressure that can lead them to becoming dizzy and nauseous.

If they need to stay inside of their homes just to avoid falling, then they will do so. The need to stay at home in order to avoid injuries increases their risk of being isolated.

2. Being Diagnosed With Alzheimer's

A person's daily routine immediately changes when they are diagnosed with a chronic illness like Alzheimer's or dementia. At the same time, retirement can be forced to change.

Some seniors feel distressed by their health condition. These negative thoughts and feelings about their illness sets them up for depression and anxiety. Days go by and you will find the senior gradually shunning away from social interactions. They prefer to be alone at home.

This is when aging in one’s own home becomes more of isolating in place. Some do receive proper treatment, but the impact of having a chronic illness extends beyond the physical aspect of a senior’s being. It can take a toll on on the senior’s emotional health.

This is true especially if the illness hinders them from doing activities they used to enjoy. Frustration sets in, thereby making them prone to isolation.

3. Lacking a Senior-Friendly Community

In addition to their fear of getting injured, some factors in the community also increase a senior’s risk of isolation.

Living in big cities where they have to cross wide streets or walk long distances to a bus stop can be difficult. It might be difficult for them to use the stairs and get to the subway. As a result, they might rather stay in their own homes.

Living in a community that is not senior-friendly can deprive them of living a happy life. Not to mention the fact that seniors have been driving their own car for most of their lives. Now that they are no longer capable of driving, public transportation can be dreadful.

4. Being Widowed or Divorced

Aging in place can equal loneliness. This is true especially for seniors who have been widowed or divorced for some time.

Getting used to being alone is not an easy thing to do. Add in the physical pain that an age-related disease brings and a senior can surely become at risk of isolation. They may also:

- Refuse to go out for an exercise because they are not used to doing it alone.
- Prefer to skip meals because the sight of a table setting for one seems unbearable.
- Refuse going out with friends because it will only remind them of happy days with their spouse.

All these things increase the possibility of seniors being isolated.

If someone you care about is considering ways to avoid isolation, make sure to equip yourself with enough knowledge to make a good decision. You should be aware of the different programs available in your community for seniors and Alzheimer's patients.

Be ready to accept the fact that aging can also mean deteriorating health. So, ask about the services that you can sign up for that will help you age in place healthfully. This way, getting older does not have to be synonymous with being lonelier.