For many of us, the holidays are a time of celebration and sharing with the ones we love. Yet it’s also true that not everyone welcomes this season. Some may not have anyone to celebrate with, or even any place to go. What’s more, many of the normal processes and transitions that happen as we grow older — hearing loss, the deaths of spouses, partners and peers, impaired mobility — put us at increased risk for loneliness and isolation.

The good news is that with greater awareness, we can all take steps to maintain and strengthen our ties to family and friends, expand our social circles and become more involved in the community around us.

These tips can help:

- Nurture and strengthen existing relationships. Ask people over for coffee, or invite them to join you for a trip to a museum or a movie.
- Schedule a time each day to call a friend or visit someone.
- Meet your neighbors — young and old.
- Use social media like Facebook to stay in touch with long-distance friends or write an old-fashioned letter.
- Stay physically active and include group exercise in the mix, like joining a walking club.
- Take a class to learn something new and, at the same time, expand your circle of friends.
- Revisit an old hobby you’ve set aside and connect with others who share your interests.
- Volunteer to deepen your sense of purpose and help others.
- Visit your local community wellness or senior center and become involved in a wide range of interesting programs.
- Check out faith-based organizations for spiritual engagement, as well as to participate in activities and events.
- Don’t let being a non-driver stop you from staying active. Find out about your transportation options.
- Get involved by taking on a cause, such as making your community more age-friendly.

If you’re struggling with loneliness, make a pledge to connect this holiday season. Strengthen those all-important bonds — because when we connect, we thrive.

Connect2Affect is collaborative effort spearheaded by AARP Foundation in cooperation with the Gerontological Society of America, Give an Hour, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging and UnitedHealth Group.