The Impact of SilverSneakers on Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Adults

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Vital Aging

Schroeder, SA. NEJM. 2007; 357.
The key to healthy aging...

“The key to healthy aging is relationships, relationships, relationships.”

George Valiant, Former Director, Harvard Study of Adult Development

“Connections with Community and Family—Not Money—Most Important for Seniors’ Quality of Life”

National Council on Aging
Social Isolation vs. Loneliness

Social Isolation is an **objective** and quantifiable reflection of reduced social network size and paucity of social contact.

Loneliness is a **subjective** state reflecting discrepancy between the **relationships** they have and the relationships they would like to have.

1 in 5 adults over age 50 are socially isolated.

43% of older adults report being lonely.
Causes of Social Isolation
Mortality

Social Isolation increases risk of death by 62 to 75%\(^1\) –

More than obesity, high cholesterol, or high blood pressure\(^1\)

Comparable to the mortality risk of smoking 15 cigarettes per day\(^2\)
The Cost of Social Isolation

Socially isolated people cost $134 per month more in Medicare costs.

Total cost of social isolation is $6.7 billion per year to Medicare.
Interventions to Reduce Social Isolation

- Group programs don’t necessarily elicit communal benefits
- No proven model
- Large scale problem requires large scale solution
Our Vision

Transform the aging experience—reducing the burden of chronic conditions among older adults, enabling these to be their best years, and inspiring the next generation that the best is yet to come.

Our Mission

We empower adults to live their best lives — with vitality, dignity and purpose.

We enable healthy aging— both in place, and in community.
SilverSneakers helps members experience their best health in mind, body, and spirit.
The SilverSneakers Program

- A free fitness benefit with access to 14,000+ fitness locations nationwide
- The ability to enroll at multiple locations at any time
- Guidance from dedicated fitness staff
- Social connections through events such as shared meals, holiday celebrations, and class socials
- Signature SilverSneakers classes designed for all fitness levels and led by certified instructors
- SilverSneakers FLEX classes offered outside traditional gym setting
- Online resources (fitness location directory, articles, videos, and more)
HEALTH OUTCOMES
SilverSneakers Participants Have Better Health Trends *

Current Health Status
% Good to Excellent

-0.6%

-3.0%

2007 2009
SilverSneakers

2007 2009
Medicare Health Outcomes Survey

Health Status Compared to Year Ago
% Same to Much Better

-1.6%

-3.8%

2007 2009
SilverSneakers

2007 2009
Medicare Health Outcomes Survey

*P < 0.0001, 2007 to 2009 trend difference
5,586 SilverSneakers program members compared to a matched national random sample of 22,344 Medicare Advantage beneficiaries

HEALTH OUTCOMES
SilverSneakers Improves Independence in Activities of Daily Living

*P < 0.0001, 2007 to 2009 trend difference
5,586 SilverSneakers program members compared to a matched national random sample of 22,344 Medicare Advantage beneficiaries

HEALTH OUTCOMES
SilverSneakers Reduces Healthcare Utilization and Cost

Lower Health Care Costs

$500 cost reduction in 2nd year

Regular Participation = More Savings

$1,252 less with 2 or more weekly visits

Early Impact on Diabetes

$1,633 savings in 1st year
$2,141 savings in 2nd year with 2+ visits per week

Fewer Hospital Admissions

3.3% fewer admissions

Reduced Risk of Depression

46% risk reduction for depression in 2nd year of participation

SilverSneakers is designed to reduce social isolation and loneliness, which may have independent health effects

Social Isolation increases Medicare costs by **$134 per month**\(^1\)

1 out of 3 of older adults live alone\(^2\)

Members make lasting and valuable new relationships with other SilverSneakers members

Social isolation increases risk of mortality by **62% to 75%**, more than obesity, high cholesterol, or high blood pressure\(^3\)

SilverSneakers social media presence builds online communities where members can interact with each other

Social isolation is equivalent to the health risks of smoking **15 cigarettes per day**\(^4\)

Loneliness increases risk of heart attack and stroke\(^5\), risk of high blood pressure and cognitive decline\(^6\)

Tivity Health and MIT AgeLab are partnering in a large study to evaluate SilverSneakers’ impact on social isolation and loneliness

49% Found programs’ social interactions increased their motivation to exercise\(^7\)

65% SilverSneakers members have made new and valuable friendships since joining\(^8\)
Aging and Social Isolation

Older adults face shrinking social circles, reduced mobility, and more often live alone and in a rural/suburban area.

Social Isolation increases risk of cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline and premature death by as much as obesity and other clinical risk factors like smoking.

Tivity Health and MIT AgeLab partnered in a large study of both SilverSneakers participants and eligible non-members to evaluate:

Can SilverSneakers Reduce Social Isolation?
Methodology Summary

Study Objective
To evaluate the impact of SilverSneakers on social isolation, and how this effect may contribute uniquely to improving health and reducing loneliness

Study design
Cross-sectional survey, with matched comparison of SilverSneakers participants to similar non-participants

Study population
Members of a large Medicare Advantage insurance provider, eligible for the SilverSneakers and with an email address
- Treatment group = SilverSneakers active participants (N=1193)
- Non-participants = Eligible for SilverSneakers, never enrolled (N=2264)

Matching method
Coarsened exact matching (CEM) by categories of: gender, age group, education and household income
Methodology Summary

Measures

• Social Isolation – Berkman social disengagement scale
• Loneliness – UCLA loneliness scale
• Health – “In general, would you say your health is...”
• Physical Activity – CDC items about frequency and intensity of physical activity

Statistical methods

• Path analysis, a form of multiple regression that estimates the direction and magnitude of the direct effects of an intervention, and indirect relationships across a set of variables.
• Controlled for:
  – 6 chronic conditions
  – vision impairment
  – hearing impairment
  – white ethnicity
  – mobility limitations
  – income
  – gender
Study Results – Physical activity

Compared to matched non-members, SilverSneakers members are...
Study Results – Social Isolation

Compared to matched non-members, SilverSneakers members are…

Less socially isolated;
Their higher physical activity further decreases social isolation

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**
SSFP participants are **more** physically active

**SOCIAL ISOLATION**
SSFP participants experience **less** isolation
Study Results – Loneliness

Compared to matched non-members, SilverSneakers members are...

- **HEALTH**: SSFP participants are healthier
- **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**: SSFP participants are more physically active
- **SOCIAL ISOLATION**: SSFP participants experience less isolation
- **LONELINESS**: SSFP participants experience less loneliness

Less lonely as a result of being less socially isolated; More healthy as a direct result of their higher physical activity
Study Results – Social Benefits of SilverSneakers Contribute to Better Health

Compared to matched non-members, SilverSneakers members are...

- **HEALTH**: SSFP participants are healthier
- **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**: SSFP participants are more physically active
- **SOCIAL ISOLATION**: SSFP participants experience less isolation
- **LONELINESS**: SSFP participants experience less loneliness

More healthy as a result of being less socially isolated and lonely, above and beyond the benefits of physical activity.
Impact of SilverSneakers on Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Health

**EMBARGOED STUDY RESULTS**

Compared to matched non-enrollees, SSFP participants:

- **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**: SSFP participants are *more* physically active.
- **SOCIAL ISOLATION**: SSFP participants experience *less* isolation.
- **LONELINESS**: SSFP participants experience *less* loneliness.
- **HEALTH**: SSFP participants are *healthier*.

SilverSneakers’ has impact on health beyond physical activity.

Reduced loneliness and social isolation improve member health over and above physical activity.

**Study Conclusion:**
SilverSneakers has benefits beyond fitness – it significantly reduces isolation and loneliness, which have additional benefits for member health.

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Maximizing Benefits for Health

Manifesto
We inspire lives in motion. To keep going, growing, and thriving. To motivate each other. To love life longer.

Fitness + Social Connection +
Emotional Motivations of SilverSneakers Community

We keep members engaged by ensuring that the program feeds the emotional needs of our members:

**EMPOWERMENT**

When it comes to forming a new habit, feeling the exhilaration and support of **being capable** and of doing what they want to do without hesitation and judgement.

**ACHIEVEMENT**

Our audience seeks a **feeling of progress & validation** and finds satisfaction in self-reflection. This is key to habit formation and helping our members develop intrinsic motivations.

**BELONGING**

For many, SilverSneakers is the first gym membership they’ve ever had. These members need to solidify **social connections & a sense of “fitting in”**—that a gym can be for their activity level & age. A social sense of belonging becomes a powerful motivator over time.
Through the Eyes of a Member

Louise, 70

“I am a 70 year old mother of 2, grandmother of 3, and a widow of 8+ years. I am a "lifelong walker." I had never actually participated in organized fitness classes. But, at 65, when SilverSneakers became available to me, I found great additions to my everyday life!

This is my list of SilverSneakers conceptual positives:

1. It gets you up, dressed, and out of the house multiple times per week--with a purpose!

2. It provides regular socialization for those of us that live alone or with an impaired spouse.

3. You will meet nice folks and new friends! You will have new people in your life, greeting you with smiles and hugs, checking on you when you are absent, and making plans to meet up with you outside of the gym. It's your workout--no competition, just encouragement and hugs from new friends!”
Through the Eyes of a Member

“As a ninety-one year old male, I look forward to each of five mornings a week (year round) spent with my fellow members at SilverSneakers! It's my "morning cup-o-coffee". I look forward to the social as well as physical mingling with my ever constant friends. (If someone is missing for more than a couple times, we get nosey and call each other as a check.)

My physical doctor found it hard to believe I am so constant in my attendance. Now he uses me as an example to other patients and we both encourage them to start a routine at SilverSneakers. My use of the treadmill, elliptical equipment, weight lifting and bench pressing, keeps me busy and in good shape.”

Bill, 91
Discussion and Questions