



### **Church and Senior Health: Tapping the Power of Community**

When it comes to improving the overall (both mental and physical) health of seniors, there are few better avenues than regular church attendance. Not only is the power of spirituality and prayer able to work wonders in many, but the biggest reason the church can be such a boon to the health of seniors lies in its ability to provide community. As we age, we have a tendency to become more alone (oftentimes through no fault of our own) and regular church attendance helps to counteract the negative effects of this isolation.

### **Socializing is good for your brain and body**

From staving off the onset of mental degeneration to boosting one's immune system, maintaining contact with friends is one of the best health strategies a senior can employ. And church is one of if not the best way to have a constant support community.

“There are health benefits of being socially active, such as a potentially reduced risk for Alzheimer’s disease, cardiovascular problems, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis and even some cancers. An active social life can boost your immune system and improve your nutrition, since you tend to eat more when you’re around others. Being social can lower your blood pressure and potentially reduce the symptoms of depression. As you can see, social activity is vital to seniors for their health and mental well-being,” [notes American Senior Communities](#).

There are multiple studies that show how much keeping an active social life can not only help lessen the effects of health issues, but also prevent them altogether.

“In one of the recent [studies](#) on the health benefits of social relationships, published earlier this year, researchers provided evidence that social ties and increased contact with family and friends are associated with a lower risk of death in young women with breast cancer. Another presented a similar conclusion with respect to surviving heart surgery. What’s more, a 2010 meta-analysis of 148 other studies showed that social connection doesn’t just help us survive health problems: the lack of it causes them,” [says Scientific American](#).

### **Community provides accountability**

It’s hard to recognize deteriorating health - whether it be mental or physical - in yourself. The good thing about going to church regularly is that you give yourself dozens of sets of watchful eyes, ones that can spot changes in your mood, appearance, and mental state. This weekly check on your wellbeing is vital to remaining healthy in old age. If you don’t show up to church one Sunday, you’ll potentially have a whole congregation wondering what’s wrong with you and checking up on you. It’s like giving yourself a giant extended family.

This accountability is a good thing for seniors battling depression who may be [turning to alcohol](#) or prescription drugs to cope with their feelings. Though we usually think of drug and alcohol addiction as a young person’s problem, it can be just a big of an issue in the elderly - and even more dangerous because it often goes overlooked. Feelings of isolation, uselessness, and sadness over the loss of a spouse can be triggers for substance abuse. Church, through its strong community ties, provide an outlet for the feelings and a built-in base of support for anyone suffering from addiction.

In the end, church attendance goes far beyond the religious implications. Some studies have shown that it can even be of benefit to those who don’t consider themselves particularly religious. That’s because for seniors, church provides the type of constant community support that is singular. There’s really nothing like it.

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