

LADY AND THE TRIBE

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EXCERPT

Loneliness Can Be Lethal

Since we live in this global, socially connected world, how is it possible for anyone to be lonely? Psychologically speaking, loneliness does not necessitate social isolation. Being lonely means feeling detached from others yet having the desire for a connection or a relationship.

Why is loneliness so lethal? As human beings, one of our greatest needs is to be seen, acknowledged, and cared for. We want to belong and be a part of something larger than ourselves. More so than men, women need to maintain close connections. Relationships increase serotonin and oxytocin, the bonding hormone. In times of stress, women don't just experience the drive toward fight or flight—they also release oxytocin. This hormone surge can compel women to “tend and befriend.”

Research is clear. Close friendships are necessary for optimal health and well-being. A longitudinal study of aging found that strong social networks lengthen survival among older people. Dr. Amir Levine suggests that social connections are the most powerful way for us to regulate our emotional distress and that proximity to someone you are securely attached to is the most effective way to calm yourself.

An article in the *New York Times* reported that close relationships create positive mental and physical reactions in our body, mind, and heart. We are less likely to experience high levels of loneliness when we feel supported by intimate and close relationships. Strong relationships with close friends or family benefit us greatly and fulfil our social needs.