

## Loneliness & Social Isolation

**Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact. Loneliness can affect us socially, emotionally and on an existential level. Social isolation is a lack of social connections. Social isolation can lead to loneliness, and up to 50% of people say they feel lonely. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly hasn't helped.**

Older adults have an increased risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation because they are more likely to face factors such as living alone, the loss of family or friends, chronic illness, and hearing loss. Many older adults go several days or weeks without seeing or speaking to anyone, and television is often their main company.

Certain older adults have a higher chance of experiencing loneliness and social isolation. These include:

- » LGBTI+ older adults
- » Immigrants
- » People who live with a disability
- » People living in residential care
- » Those who live alone or are widowed
- » Retirees

There are many health risks associated with loneliness and social isolation, and it is thought that:

- » Social isolation can increase an older person's risk of premature death
- » Loneliness is associated with higher rates of mental ill-health such as depression
- » Loneliness is associated with an increased risk of suicide
- » Social isolation has been linked to an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia
- » Lack of social relationships has been associated with an increased risk of heart disease and stroke
- » Loneliness and social isolation are associated with an increased risk of emergency department and hospital admissions.

Feeling lonely or isolated is a sign that you need to reconnect, do things a little differently or reach out for support. Someone who is lonely probably also finds it hard to reach out as there is a stigma surrounding loneliness, but there are also ways to overcome it, even if you live alone and find it hard to get out.

It is important to remember that loneliness can affect anyone, and most people go through times in their life when they feel lonely, isolated, or disconnected from others. As human beings, we all need to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion. Connection is the antidote to loneliness and social isolation.



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## What can you do if you are experiencing loneliness and social isolation?

- » Talk about it with trusted friends, family, or neighbours
- » Find a supportive GP who will know who to refer to or suggest resources
- » Engage with the people in your life in a meaningful way and find the courage to reveal your vulnerability. It is okay to not be okay.
- » If you feel lonely, reassess your current social connections and networks. Do the people you spend time with make you feel positive, and are they kind?
- » Smile even if it is hard. Smiling at others is often a way to begin a conversation. Try this at the shops or the doctors.
- » If you are shy or not sure what to say, try asking people about themselves. Often people enjoy talking about what they have been doing.
- » Reach out and invite friends for tea or meet outside if possible. It may be that others are feeling just as lonely as you.
- » Keep in touch by phone. This can be the next best thing to being with others
- » Learn to love a computer. If your friends and family live far away, this is an excellent way to stay in touch, especially with grandchildren
- » A tablet computer can be handy if you can't get around very easily. You can sit down with it, carry it easily, and the screen is clear and bright
- » Learn some basic computer skills, libraries and community centres often hold regular training courses as well as being a good place to meet others
- » Get involved in local community activities. These will vary, but belonging to a walking or art group, book club, bridge, bingo, or attending quiz nights or faith groups may help
- » Get out and about, try not to wait for people to come to you, one advantage of being older is that public transport and travel is cheaper
- » Help others and use your knowledge and experience to give something back to your community. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, learn new skills and increase confidence
- » Notice what times of the day or week are most challenging and plan some things to do at those times, such as phoning someone in the evening
- » Try calling a helpline, there are some excellent resources such as Friendline <https://www.friendline.org.au/> or ask your aged care centre about subscribing to Silver Memories <https://silvermemories.com.au/about/>, which is a radio station for older people

**If you would like more support, download the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement's My Grief App for immediate information about receiving bereavement support or supporting someone who is grieving.**

**Contact the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement's Aged Care Support Service on 1800 222 200 or at [www.aged.grief.org.au](http://www.aged.grief.org.au) to arrange to speak to a Specialist Bereavement Counsellor about telephone or online counselling or to find out about a group support.**



## Contact Us

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