

# Mental health & Wellbeing - What are Loneliness and Isolation?



Loneliness is feeling sad about being by yourself, particularly over a long period of time. Isolation is being separated from other people and your environment. Loneliness can sometimes be felt even in relationships or when surrounded by people.

How do loneliness and isolation from others affect our mental health and wellbeing?

From time to time everyone feels lonely, but long periods of loneliness and social isolation can have a negative impact on both your physical and mental wellbeing. Common signs of loneliness can be:

- physical symptoms - increased pains, headaches or worsening of illnesses or medical conditions
  - mental health conditions - depression, anxiety or panic attacks
  - low energy or lack of motivation
  - have trouble sleeping
  - sudden swings in weight - either gain or loss
  - increased alcohol consumption, smoking or use of drugs
- a feeling of hopelessness/worthlessness

## What helps?

There are a number of ways to help overcome loneliness and isolation and help connect with others. You don't have to do this alone either, contact Inclusion WA for more details on how they can support you or someone you know get connected.

## Connect with friends/family

staying in contact with or reconnecting with loved ones can help prevent loneliness and isolation. If your family don't live nearby, technology can help stay in touch. The local library can also help to provide access to some of these technologies, such as email, social networking sites and even skype.

“Isolation and loneliness are something that can be experienced by anyone, whatever their age or situation. This problem of isolation is so severe that we have included it as one of the five 'giant evils' that must be tackled.”

Ruth Hardy



## Our Top 5 Tips!

1. Don't isolate yourself further - reach out to family, friends, work mates or a professional.
2. Keep busy.
3. Make realistic goals for the future.
4. Connect with your community - either join a group, walk around your park regularly or volunteer
5. Exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet.

### What are loneliness and isolation?

#### Get out and about

if possible, try regularly attending social functions, visiting friends, exercising or simply going out to the shops. These can all help to overcome loneliness and if you have transport or mobility issues, then think about catching a taxi, using public transport or asking car pooling with a friend.

#### Looking after yourself

When you are feeling down or lonely, sometimes it is easy to forget about taking care of yourself. Remember that eating healthy and exercising regularly can play a large role in affecting our mood. Exercising at your local park or walking around your neighbourhood, is also a great way to get out of the house and potentially meet new people. It is also important to get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night as this helps to recharge our batteries.

Another key point to remember is that alcohol is a depressant and can make you feel worse, so it is always best to limit your intake.

#### Get involved in your community or local club

Getting involved in your community is a great way to meet new people, learn new skills and expand of social networks. You might want to think about getting involved in something you have previously tried or perhaps you might want to try something new. Think about things you enjoy doing as this will help you identify a new hobby . You can visit your local library, or contact your community development officer at the local government to find out about activities. Alternatively, you can contact Inclusion WA for more ideas or help identifying and developing a community connection goal.

#### Volunteer in your local community

By getting involved in your community and helping others out, you give yourself a great opportunity to meet new people and give something back to your community. Volunteering WA ([www.volunteeringwa.org.au](http://www.volunteeringwa.org.au)) is a great place to start researching volunteering positions, however you can also get in touch with Inclusion WA.

#### Consider getting a pet

Pets can be great companions and provide comfort and support during times of stress, ill-health or isolation. Contact your local RSPCA, veterinarian or pet shop for advice on finding the best appropriate pet for you.



“ Being socially disconnected - a loose term usually taken to mean having few good friends or strong family relationships - is said to be equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes per day and to heavy drinking of six units of alcohol per day ”

The Australian - 2010

### GETTING HELP

If you are concerned about your own or a friend's mental health and wellbeing, getting support can help you or your friend keep on track at work, study or school as well as in your family relationships. The sooner you get help the sooner things can improve.