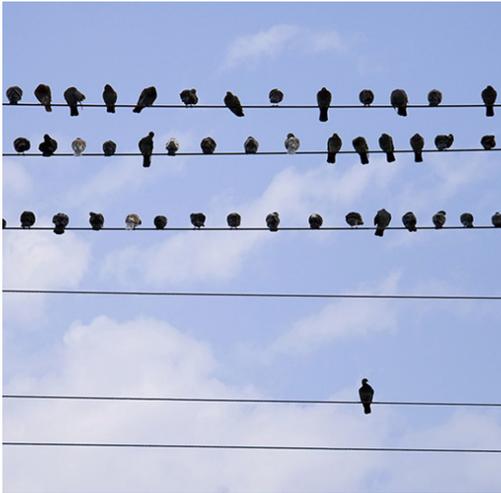




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LONELINESS IS A THREAT TO YOUR MENTAL WELLNESS!

This month we explore loneliness and its link to poor mental health. We're only just starting to realise the significant impact that loneliness has on mental wellness. Read on to find out more.

Click [here](#) to read last month's newsletter, all about exercise and its benefits for your mental health, and to access all our previous articles.

If you're interested in our previous articles, please click [here](#)

Increase Your Connections for Better Mental Health

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If you've got a suggestion for an article, or there's something more you would like to hear about, please send us an email - click [here](#)

An increasing amount of research is pointing towards loneliness being a threat to our mental health. Why? Well, we're deeply social creatures, and we've evolved to be so. We lived in groups for many thousands of years; however, living isolated lives as we do nowadays goes counter to our innate psychological needs of connection, support and safety. We explore more of the what, why and how in the following pages.

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What Is Loneliness?

We all feel lonely from time to time – this is natural. And you may choose to live alone and/or not have much contact with others, and this makes you happy. However, loneliness feels different to feeling or being alone.

Loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. This can happen even when we're surrounded by people – especially if we don't feel understood or care for by those around us.

And loneliness is increasing. For instance, people who say they don't have a single confidant has tripled in the last few decades. Two-thirds of people say they have just a few or no friends or relatives nearby to lend support. And five in 10 people said they felt alone much of the time or always. Further, the numbers are even higher for older people, who may be more likely to live alone, or have spouses and friends who have passed away.

It's true that modern life seems to be chipping away those social connections that are so critical for our mental health. Many people live hundreds or thousands of miles away from their families, and most simply don't have the same kinds of village as humans evolved to live in, let alone raise kids in.

And it's not just adults and older people. Tweens and teens appear also to be feeling this, though perhaps for different reasons from adults. Screens may play a bigger role in their lives, and affect their social lives at least as much. Indeed, a number of studies have found that more time on screens is linked to teen depression and even suicidality, while in-person social interaction is linked to better mental health. This is not particularly surprising, but it is ironic.

Why Does Loneliness Occur?

For some people, certain life events may mean they feel lonely, such as:

- experiencing a bereavement
- going through a relationship break-up
- starting at university
- changing jobs and feeling isolated from your co-workers
- retiring and losing the social contact you had at work
- moving to a new area or country without family, friends or community networks

Other people find they feel lonely at certain times of the year, such as around Christmas.

Some research suggests that people who live in certain circumstances, or belong to particular groups, are more vulnerable to loneliness. For example, if you:

- have no, or few, friends or family
- are estranged from your family
- are a single parent or care for someone
- belong to minority groups and live in an area without others from a similar background
- are excluded from social activities due to mobility problems or financial reasons
- experience discrimination and stigma because of a disability or long-term health problem, including mental health
- experience discrimination and stigma because of your gender, race or sexual orientation
- have experienced sexual or physical abuse – you may find it harder to form close relationships with other people

Some people experience deep and constant feelings of loneliness that do not disappear, regardless of their social situation or how many friends they have. There are many reasons people experience this kind of loneliness. You might feel unable to like yourself or to be liked by others, or you may lack self-confidence.

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How Does It Affect Mental Wellness?

Feeling lonely isn't in itself a mental health problem, but the two are strongly linked. Having a mental health problem can increase your chance of feeling lonely. For example, some people may have misconceptions about what mental health problems mean, so you may find it difficult to speak to them about your problems.

Or you may experience social anxiety and find it difficult to engage in everyday activities involving other people, which could lead to a lack of meaningful social contact and cause feelings of loneliness.

Feeling lonely can also have a negative impact on your mental health, especially if these feelings have lasted a long time. Some research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems and increased stress.

What Can You Do?

Don't Rush : Start off by going somewhere like a cafe, the movies or a sports event where you can be around people, but not be expected to talk to them. Next, go somewhere it's not expected that you'll interact straight away, like a class where everyone is focused on an activity. Or, if you're going to a group or class, you could just go along and watch at first.

Make New Connections : Try to join a class or group based on your hobbies or interests. Also, volunteering is a good way of meeting people, and helping others can also really improve your mental health.

Try Peer Support : Organisation, such as Red Cross have services which put you in touch with volunteers who will spend time with you. Or join an online community to feel supported.

Try To Open Up : You might feel that you know plenty of people, but maybe you don't feel close to them. It might help to open up about how you feel. If you don't feel comfortable opening up to the people you know, you could try speaking with a therapist.

Talking Therapies : Talking therapies allow you to explore and understand your feelings of loneliness and can help you develop positive ways of dealing with them. Therapy can provide a space for you to discuss the things that make it hard for you to form satisfying relationships.

Don't Compare : We all do it, but it can help to just be aware that things are not always what they seem from the outside. For example on social media, we very often only see what other people want to share about their lives, and this can make us feel like we are the only ones feeling lonely.

Look After Yourself : Feeling lonely can be very stressful and can have a big impact on your general wellbeing, which might make it even harder to make positive steps to feeling better. Try to get enough sleep, eat well, do some physical activity, spend time in nature, spend time with animals, and avoid drugs and alcohol.

The Take Away

Research has often illustrated that having strong social connections is linked not only to happiness, but also to long-term health as we age. Harvard's longevity study, spanning 80 years, found that social connection appears to be the key variable that's linked to greater happiness and wellbeing, as well as a longer life.

So take some time to think about not just the individual habits you carry out, but also more generally about how your life is structured. Are there things you could do to meaningfully increase your connection to others?

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Talks

The Value Of Human Connection by Kim Gemmell

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTt_qLlIkos

Fulfillment in life isn't about objects or possessions; true fulfillment is about our relationships and communication with each other. In today's dominating tech world we are seeing more human disconnection than ever. Many friendships are virtual, and although we may have 500 or more friends on Facebook, many of us are lonely. Kim brings an awareness that we can begin to lead more fulfilled lives by understanding we are one, and that supporting each other is living with a wonderful purpose.

You Are Not Alone In Your Loneliness by Jonny Sun

https://www.ted.com/talks/jonny_sun_you_are_not_alone_in_your_loneliness?language=en#t-43421

Being open and vulnerable with your loneliness, sadness and fear can help you find comfort and feel less alone, says writer and artist Jonny Sun. In an honest talk filled with his signature illustrations, Sun shares how telling stories about feeling like an outsider helped him tap into an unexpected community and find a tiny sliver of light in the darkness.

How To Get Rid of Loneliness And Become Happy by Olivia Remes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZT-bB66ilk>

Loneliness can increase your risk of depression and early death, and it can affect your immune system. Loneliness is silent and contagious, but it can be overcome. In her talk, Olivia will share her insights on loneliness and how to beat it.

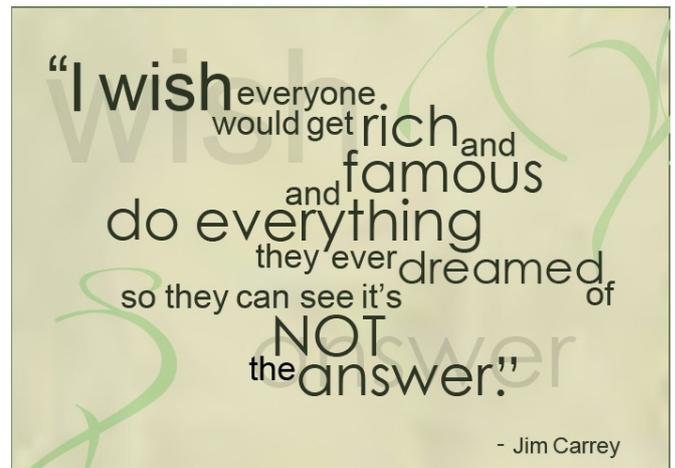
Website

Australian Coalition To End Loneliness

<https://www.endloneliness.com.au/>

The Australian Coalition to End Loneliness is a collaboration of organisations and community groups working together to build an evidence-based approach to ending loneliness in Australia.

As always, if you would like some help, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, admin@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)



If at any stage, you find you need urgent assistance – go to your closest **Emergency Department**, call the **Mental Health Emergency Line** on 13 14 65, or call **Lifeline** on 13 11 14.

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