



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Local Government and Communities**

# Stay connected and be involved

A guide to building a healthier  
happier life



## Can you do more to get the best out of life?

Staying connected and engaging regularly with family and friends is one of the best ways to keep happy and healthy.

Research shows that infrequent participation in social activities can lead to loneliness and social isolation. It also shows that many older West Australians are disconnected and don't have these important relationships. It is anticipated that as the population ages the number of seniors who become isolated will increase.

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If you get anxious or concerned about meeting new people or starting new activities try talking to your GP or health professional.

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## Social isolation and loneliness – How does it happen?

Social isolation and loneliness are commonly used to describe a reduction in a person's activity that can lead to them feeling continually lonely.

Older people are more likely than others to experience both social isolation and loneliness. This may be due to a variety of factors such as:

- reduced mobility due to health problems
- fears about their safety
- having less time because they are caring for a loved one
- living in a rural or remote community
- shrinking social networks
- a lack of transport
- language, cultural or religious barriers that may prevent them from accessing community and/or support services
- a lack of appropriate and affordable activities in the local area
- a lack of knowledge about available activities and support services.

Many people overcome these challenges and continue to lead full and active social lives. However, some people cannot find appropriate solutions, or feel nervous about starting something new. Others may choose to opt out of social engagements. Over time they could become unintentionally isolated as a result of spending less time with others.

### References:

Pettigrew, S. & M. Pescud (2013). A Review of Recent Social Isolation Literature. Report prepared for the Department of Local Government and Communities, Government of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia.

Zimet, G.D., Dahlem, N.W., Zimet, S.G. & Farley, G.K. (1988). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52, 30-41.

## What is the difference between being alone, and being isolated and lonely?

It's not uncommon to feel overwhelmed by the day-to-day demands in our lives. It's often suggested that we take time out to recharge in order to maintain our health and well-being. Choosing to be alone to rest and re-energise is not the same as being socially isolated and always lonely.

It is normal to feel lonely sometimes. Most people will automatically do something to change this. They might phone a close friend or a family member for a chat, go for a walk around the neighbourhood, or decide to catch up with people they haven't seen for a while.

However, if feelings of loneliness are constant, and prevent a person from taking steps to lift their spirits, they may become socially isolated.



People suffering from social isolation generally need more:

- social contacts
- engagement with others
- social integration.

People suffering from loneliness generally need:

- a sense of belonging
- more fulfilling relationships
- more quality friendships.

Research shows that a significant reduction in social activity can impact on a person's physical and mental well-being. Addressing social isolation and loneliness can help to reduce the risk of mental and physical health problems such as:

- depression and anxiety
- poor nutrition
- heavy drinking
- falls
- re-occurring hospitalisation and institutionalisation
- premature mortality
- elder abuse
- cognitive decline including dementia.

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If you do nothing about feeling down or overwhelmed, nothing will change.

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## What can be done?

Research shows that joining group-based activities can prevent or reduce social isolation and loneliness.

Older people who participate in group activities:

- may live longer
- are less likely to suffer depression, anxiety or dementia
- are less likely to experience a fall
- are less likely to be hospitalised or need to go into residential aged care.

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Enjoying the company of others is a great way to stay happy and healthy.

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## What could you do?

There are many ways to keep active and stay connected. You might choose to:

### Join a group

- Find an exercise group such as walking, cycling, golfing, dancing, Tai Chi, or yoga in your local area.
- Get involved in a club, a society or culturally specific or special interest group, such as an environmental group, chess club or your local Men's Shed.

### Take a class

- Learn about something that interests you such as art, food or a new language.
- Start, or resume, playing a musical instrument or singing in a choir.
- Learn how to use a computer, the internet or social media. These are great ways to stay in contact with family and friends, especially those who live far away.

### Volunteer

- Join a community gardening project.
- Mentor children and young people through programs such as the School Volunteer Program.
- Your local library is a good source of information about projects that can benefit the community.

### Join a sporting or recreational club

- Many clubs, such as fishing or golf, have seniors' teams, sessions or competitions. It's never too late to get involved.

If you are not quite ready to join a group, commit to organising outings with your family or friends. You could:

- Find an event in your community – your local paper, library and community or seniors centre noticeboards are good sources of information.
- Go to community events and activities such as concerts, morning teas or workshops. These are usually free or low cost.
- Go to the theatre, art gallery, see a movie or shopping.
- Share a meal with others.

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Getting involved and staying connected can improve your quality of life.

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## What can you do to help others?

### **Do you know someone who could do with a helping hand?**

Sometimes it is hard to take a friend's constant 'no' to offers to join in, meet up or spend time together. Understandably, many people stop making invitations.

The reasons for temporary withdrawal are often valid and understandable. Changes in life circumstances such as caring responsibilities, financial difficulties or grief can make people reluctant to socialise.

However, continued disengagement, by choice or circumstance, can lead to a decline in a person's well-being.

If you know someone who has stopped saying yes to social invitations, don't give up. Try visiting them at home or keep in regular contact by phone or email. Your friend may eventually decide to accept your invitation.

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See the back page for details about organisations and services that can help you to find an activity or connect with other people.

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## A simple checklist – How well do you score?

Addressing social isolation and loneliness can be complex and identifying those at risk is difficult. Some people are good at hiding their feelings or denying that they are unhappy. It can be quite confronting to admit - even to yourself - that you are feeling lonely and becoming isolated.

Research shows that social isolation and loneliness can be related to the total number of contacts a person has with others, as well as the quality of these relationships.

This simple checklist can assist you to think about how socially connected you are.

### General self-assessment checklist

(This checklist does not replace a professional diagnosis)		Yes	No	Sometimes
1.	There is a close and trusted person who is around when I am in need	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	There is a close and trusted person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	My family really tries to help me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I get the emotional help and support I need from my family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I have a close and trusted friend who is a real source of comfort to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	My friends really try to help me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I can count on my friends when things go wrong	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I can talk about my problems with my family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	There is a close and trusted person in my life who cares about my feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	My family is willing to help me make decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	I can talk about my problems with my friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### What your responses mean

If you answered mostly 'yes', you are socially connected and your relationships are likely to be healthy and supportive.

If you answered 'no' or 'sometimes' to some or all of these questions, it may be time to think about re-connecting with your family and friends, or getting involved in social activities.

If your responses have raised issues that have made you feel anxious or worried, remember that you do not have to work this out on your own. There are people you can talk with.

For confidential support consider talking with your GP or a counselling service such as **beyondblue** 1300 22 4636 or **Relationships Australia** 1300 364 277.

## Where can you find out about things to do?

Your local government should be able to provide you with information on activities and events in your local community.

To find the contact details of your local community development office, library and the community, leisure or senior citizens centres should be available through your:

- local government – by phone or online
- community newspaper
- White Pages.

Local government details are available at <http://dlg.wa.gov.au/Content/Directory/Default.aspx>

**Seniors' Recreation Council**  
246 Vincent Street, Leederville  
Telephone: (08) 9492 9773  
Email: [info@srcwa.asn.au](mailto:info@srcwa.asn.au)  
Website: [www.srcwa.asn.au](http://www.srcwa.asn.au)

**Act Belong Commit**  
Telephone: (08) 9266 3788  
Email: [info@actbelongcommit.org.au](mailto:info@actbelongcommit.org.au)  
Website: [www.actbelongcommit.org.au](http://www.actbelongcommit.org.au)

**Volunteering WA**  
Telephone: (08) 9482 4333  
Website: [www.volunteeringwa.org.au/volunteers/find-a-position.aspx](http://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/volunteers/find-a-position.aspx)

**Western Australian Men's Shed Association (WAMSA)**  
PO Box 663, Wembley, W.A. 6913  
Telephone: 0438 388 337  
Email: [admin@wamsa.org.au](mailto:admin@wamsa.org.au)  
Website: [www.wamsa.org.au/blog](http://www.wamsa.org.au/blog)

**Red Cross Telecross**  
Provides a daily phone call to seniors who have little or no social contact.  
Telephone: 1300 885 698  
Website: [www.redcross.org.au/telecross.aspx](http://www.redcross.org.au/telecross.aspx)

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These organisations and services can help you find new sources of social activity.

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**Community Resource Centres**  
Telephone: (08) 6552 1863  
Freecall: 1800 049 155 (country callers only)  
Email: [crc@drd.wa.gov.au](mailto:crc@drd.wa.gov.au)  
Website: [www.crc.net.au](http://www.crc.net.au)

**Befriend**  
Provide opportunities for people to connect with others.  
Telephone: 0404 831 201  
Email: [efriends@befriend.org.au](mailto:efriends@befriend.org.au)  
Website: [www.befriend.org.au](http://www.befriend.org.au)

**University of the Third Age U3A (UWA)**  
Telephone: (08) 6488 1857  
Website: [www.u3auwa.org](http://www.u3auwa.org)

**Mature Adult Learning Association (MALA)**  
Email: [perthmala@westnet.com.au](mailto:perthmala@westnet.com.au)  
Website: [www.perthmala.org.au](http://www.perthmala.org.au)

**Independent Living Centre WA**  
Multicultural Aged Care Services.  
Telephone: (08) 9381 0660  
Email: [ilcmacs@ilc.com.au](mailto:ilcmacs@ilc.com.au)  
Website: [www.ilc.com.au](http://www.ilc.com.au)

**WA Seniors Card Centre / Seniors Information Service**  
WA Seniors Card Centre  
Gordon Stephenson House  
Level 2, 140 William Street  
Perth, WA 6000  
Entry is from lifts in arcade off Murray Street Mall.  
Telephone: (08) 6551 8800 (metro)  
Freecall: 1800 671 233 (country)  
Email: [seniorscard@dlgc.wa.gov.au](mailto:seniorscard@dlgc.wa.gov.au)  
Website: [www.seniorscard.wa.gov.au](http://www.seniorscard.wa.gov.au)





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