



LONELINESS



OP-ALMA

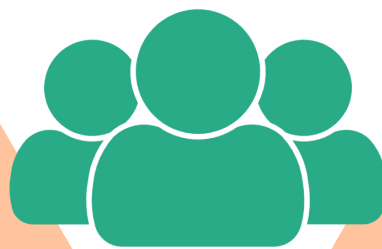
Research shows that feeling socially connected can help us better manage pain.




We can all feel lonely from time to time. However, when loneliness is a regular feeling, it can have a significant negative impact on our health.



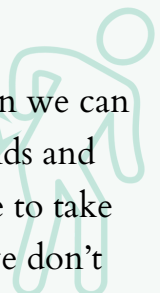
Loneliness is a subjective feeling, just like feeling angry, happy or sad. It is different to being alone.



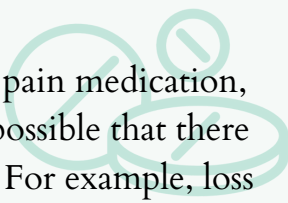
Research suggests that loneliness is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day¹ and can increase the risk of dementia by 64%².




As we get older we may become more vulnerable to feeling lonely. We are likely to face health concerns, our social circles get smaller, and if we lose our spouse or partner, there is a greater chance of experiencing loneliness.



When living with chronic pain we can feel disconnected from friends and family. We might feel unable to take part in usual activities and we don't want to be a burden to others. Pain can often contribute to low mood and tiredness, causing us to withdraw from others which can trigger loneliness.



When taking strong pain medication, such as opioids, it is possible that there might be side effects. For example, loss of interest in usual activities, difficulty driving, and trouble thinking clearly³. This can make it hard to participate in activities we used to enjoy.



If we choose to, it is possible to make positive changes to our social lives. Identifying your interests and hobbies is a great way to start connecting with others.



TIP

Connecting with others might mean trying new things and learning (or re-learning) some social skills. With practice, we can feel more confident to reach out to others.

'EASE' INTO SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Keep in mind the acronym 'EASE'⁴ to gradually increase your social connections

E- Extend Yourself

Extend yourself by doing something you wouldn't usually do. Start with a small opportunity to connect with others and build your confidence. Don't expect too much! Look for opportunities in your daily life to show interest and curiosity to others. Ideas to try...



Wave 'hello' to your neighbour when you see them.



Hold open the door for someone at the shop.



Start a conversation with the shopkeeper, "Have you been busy?"

How could you start *extending yourself*? Write down your ideas.

A- Action Plan

Starting a new activity is a great way to meet people with similar interests. Identify a new activity you would like to try and identify the required steps to get started. Write them down to create your 'action plan'. See the following page for some new activity ideas.

New Activity: *e.g., reading*

Step 1: *e.g., ask the local library about book clubs*

Step 2: *e.g., find out which book the club are currently reading*

Step 3: *e.g., attend the club*

Activities to Try



Gardening



Reading



Tai-Chi



Knitting



Meditation



Bird Watching

S- Selection

When selecting new friends, it is important to think about what qualities you are looking for. Strong relationships are those that are mutual and require a similar level of interest, commitment, and sharing on both sides. Aim to create quality relationships with others.

What qualities am I looking for in a friend?

e.g., good sense of humour; honesty

E- Expect the best

Avoiding social activity may protect us from some negative social experiences, but it also prevents us from having positive social experiences. When starting a new activity or friendship, it is important to expect the best and remind ourselves of our past successes.

Describe the last time you attended a social event and it was a success!

e.g., bus trip to Macedon Ranges in 2019 - I sat with a really interesting woman and chatted the whole way, which I enjoyed



CONNECT

Scan this QR code to learn more
about the health impacts of
loneliness:
<http://bit.ly/opalma-lonely>



Scan this QR code to find volunteering
opportunities in Victoria:
<http://bit.ly/opalma-volunteer>



1. Holt-Lunstad, J., Robles, T. F., & Sbarra, D. A. (2017). Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *American Psychologist*, 72(6), 517–530.

2. Holwerda TJ et al. (2012). Feelings of loneliness, but not social isolation, predict dementia onset: Results from the Amsterdam Study of the Elderly (AMSTEL). *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry*, 85, 135–142

3. Baldini A, Von Korff M, Lin EH. (2012) A review of potential adverse effects of long-term opioid therapy: a practitioner's guide. *The Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders*, 14(3), n/a.

4. Cacioppe, J. T., & Patrick, W. (2008). *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*. W. W. Norton & Company, New York London.