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## Why Your Loneliness Really Matters

Loneliness is generally understood as the deficiency between our preferred and our actual level of closeness and affection with a partner (emotional loneliness) and/or with close friends and family (social loneliness).

Simply living alone is not indicative of loneliness; solitude can be a preferred and positive state for some people and not necessarily negative.

Loneliness is common, especially with increasing age. Studies across large numbers of people consistently identify over one quarter of those beyond age 60 as being lonely. The COVID pandemic magnified the importance of acknowledging and managing loneliness.

### Risk of Loneliness

Loneliness is associated with a wide range of health outcomes in later life, including impaired daytime functioning, reduced physical activity, a lower sense of wellbeing and poor physical health.

Loneliness is predictive of depression, impaired cognitive performance, dementia, likelihood of aged care admission and multiple disease outcomes such as high blood pressure, heart disease and strokes.

Despite a wide range of research, most interventions at the community level have not made significant inroads into the prevalence of loneliness.

A further challenge is that the 'maintain separation' strategy designed to lessen the impact of the spread of COVID on our community has magnified the growing concern about the negative impacts of increasing loneliness. Some commentators believe that loneliness itself is reaching epidemic proportions.

### Solutions

Because loneliness has a highly individual basis, community-wide solutions remain problematic. Solutions we devise for ourselves seem the most effective way to proceed. What could we consider?

In the shorter term:

- Maximise the opportunities for social contacts. Use every opportunity to share outdoor exercise possibilities with another, within pandemic restrictions.
- Do things you really enjoy: talking about them with others can then provide an additional mutual benefit.
- Think about the nature of your contacts. A review of our article [Interacting With Others](#) may add some ideas.
- Using your own responses to the SHAPE Analyser, take a more positive view about managing your health. This can lead you to more productive discussion with your health advisers too. If

you feel a need for professional support and counselling, your GP can introduce you to services that are low cost and supportive.

Longer term, work through the steps outlined in the Longevity Plan, including:

- What will I do with myself – the choice of activities will influence your capacity to deal with loneliness, including how these decisions influence contact with others.
- Where will I choose to live and why down the track. This is something that can be discussed with friends and family: ease of contact with them is an important consideration.

As well as being a concern, loneliness can also be a trigger for moving into a better personal space. Working through a longer-term plan for your future – and discussing it with others - can also help to relieve immediate pressures and anxieties.

### Your Longevity Plan

Start or revisit your own Longevity Plan to better prepare for the future.

Try your free upgraded  
**SHAPE Analyser** now