

# Looking out for one another

Social isolation and loneliness – recognising the signs in friends, family and yourself



A RESOURCE  
FOR SENIORS

## Understanding social isolation and loneliness

“Nobody wants to feel isolated or alone. Feeling like we’ve lost our social circle can affect many aspects of our lives negatively, even our health.”

Office for Senior Citizens

Being socially isolated means being separated from your family and social groups. You can become socially isolated if you live alone, don’t have access to transport, or have poor health.

If you are socially isolated you are more likely to be lonely. You can feel lonely when:

- you don’t interact enough with others
- your existing relationships don’t give you the emotional support you need.

Studies show that staying socially connected can have benefits for both our physical and mental wellbeing.

There’s no single solution to social isolation – everyone has different needs.

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**Did you know that half of older New Zealanders experience some degree of loneliness?**



## Staying socially connected

There are many ways to connect with people if you're feeling socially isolated or lonely.

You can:

- use your SuperGold card to get out and about – [www.supergold.govt.nz](http://www.supergold.govt.nz)
- get to know your neighbours – try Neighbourhood Support or [www.neighbourly.co.nz](http://www.neighbourly.co.nz)
- get a smartphone or tablet to stay in touch with distant friends and family – find out about learning new technical skills at [www.seniornet.co.nz](http://www.seniornet.co.nz)
- visit your local library, community centre or church to find out about activities
- have a meal with friends or family – why not invite a friend out for a coffee?
- try a visiting service like Age Concern's accredited visiting service – [www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)
- try volunteering – support your community and meet new people – [www.volunteeringnz.org.nz](http://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz)



## Planning ahead before moving

Relocating can sometimes mean losing long-term connections. If you're planning to move, consider the following:

- can you access public transport?
- do you have friends or people you know living nearby?
- how far is the nearest grocery store, pharmacy or public library? Are they easy to access?
- are there any social activities or opportunities to connect with others?
- how important is technology for you to keep in touch? Will you have internet access?
- have you told your friends and family that you are moving?

## Looking out for others

If you think that someone you know is isolated or lonely, you can help by:

- visiting those at risk of isolation
- giving them a sense of purpose, like a plant or a pet to take care of (if they are capable)
- sharing your skills with them – it could be gardening or knitting
- keeping in touch regularly
- asking a neighbour to keep an eye on them.

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**It's okay to ask for help if you're feeling lonely**



## Social isolation checklist

Social isolation and loneliness affects older and younger people the most. Use this checklist to find out if you or someone you know is at risk.

### Have you, or someone you know, experienced:

- the loss of a spouse, partner or friends (through death or relocation)
- difficulty meeting new people
- communicating in English
- a move to a new country or a different way of life
- the loss of a vehicle or driver licence
- retirement from work
- poor health, frailty or sickness
- depression or mental health problems.

### These experiences can be especially hard if you or that person is:

- living alone
- suffering from poor health
- unemployed
- finding it difficult to meet other people
- financially dependent
- suffering from grief, depression or anxiety
- facing a worsening medical condition.

If these experiences sound familiar, you or someone you know may be feeling isolated or lonely.

## Where to go for help

These are some of the organisations that may be able to support you.

- Neighbourhood Support
- University of the Third Age
- Age Concern
- GreyPower
- Menzshed
- SeniorNet
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Senior Chef
- Probus
- RSA
- Rural Women
- St John's Caring Caller Service
- Asian Family Services
- Community Education

**Local councils** – most local councils have information about groups and activities in your area. Joining groups and activities can be a good start to connecting with other like-minded people.

**SuperSeniors** – for more information about staying socially connected visit [www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz](http://www.superseniors.msd.govt.nz)



**Office for Senior Citizens**  
Te Tari Kaumātua

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