

The power of friendship for older people

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How common is loneliness?

- Over half of Australians felt lonely at least one day in a week, while 28% felt lonely for three days or more
- Recent results from a representative Australian sample indicated that 46% of older adults (aged 65 years or above) reported feeling that they lacked companionship at least sometimes.
(Lim, 2018)



Unpacking loneliness - causes

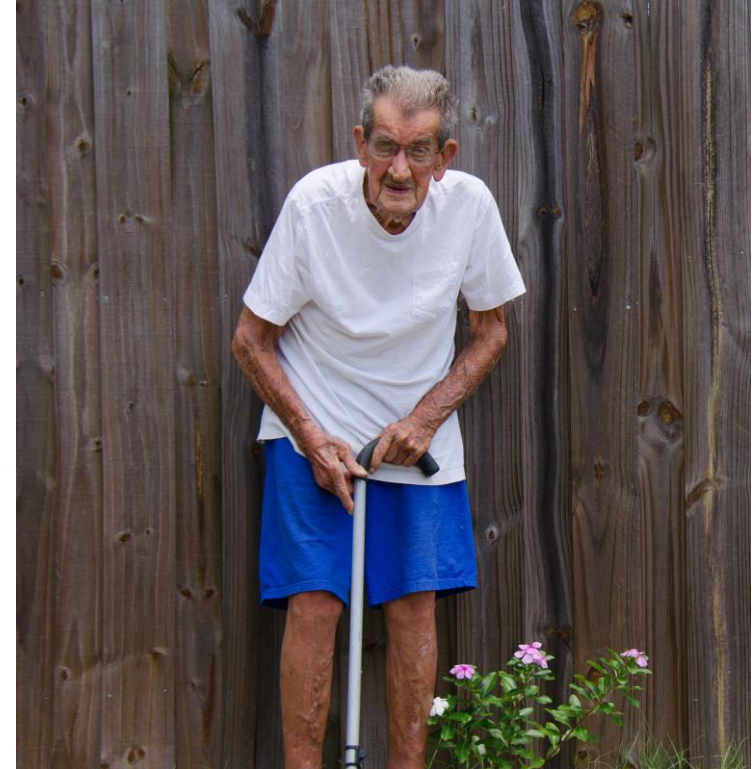


- Mobility or health issues
- Living alone
- Grief
- Quality of social contact
- Age
- Location of residence
- Significant life changes

Correlates and consequences

Loneliness is associated with:

- Asthma, migraine, osteoarthritis, hypertension, back pain, tinnitus (Christiansen et al, 2021)
- Poor sleep quality (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010)
- Mental health problems including depression and cognitive decline (Matthews et al, 2019)
- Increased mortality rates (Lester, Mead, Graham, Gask & Reilly, 2012)



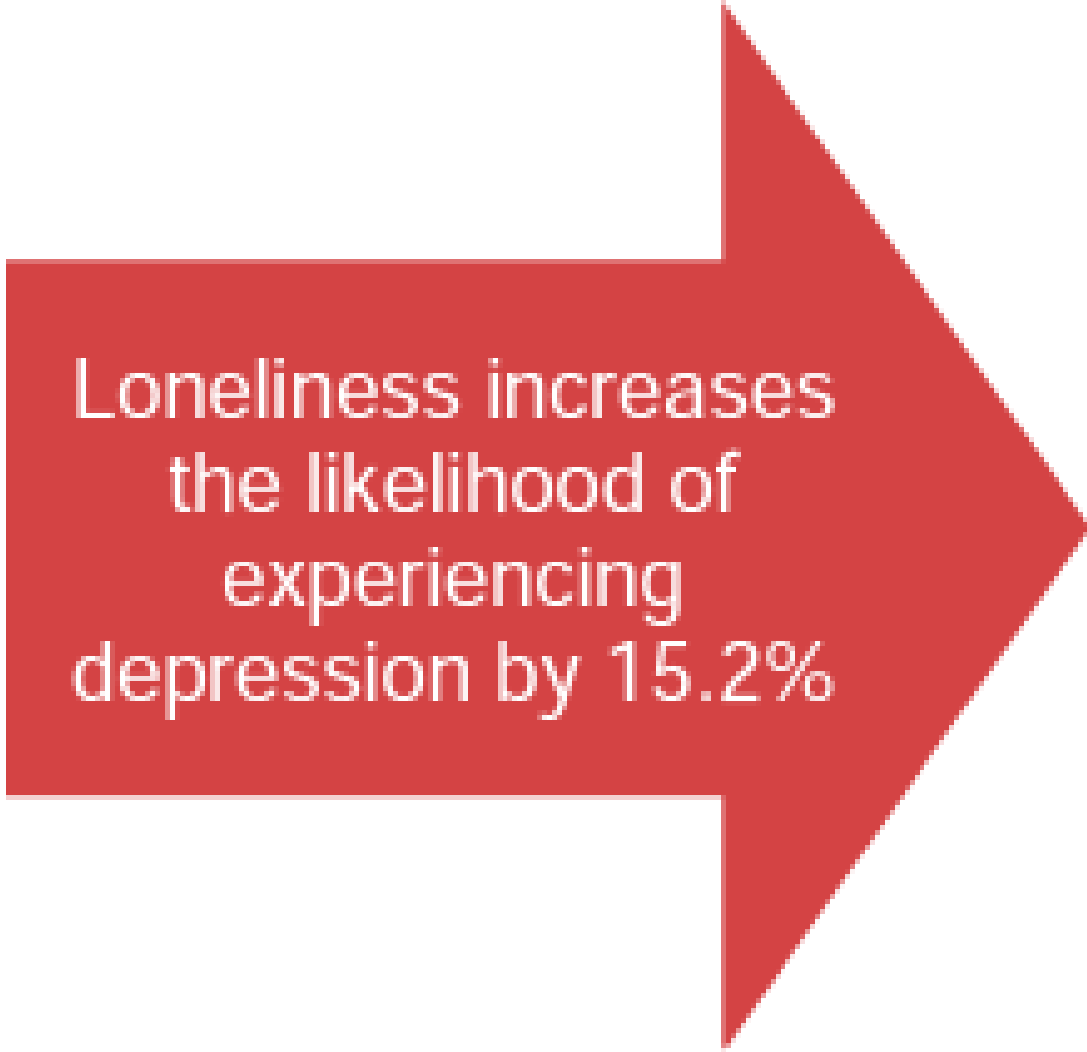
Loneliness is a health issue

Loneliness can:

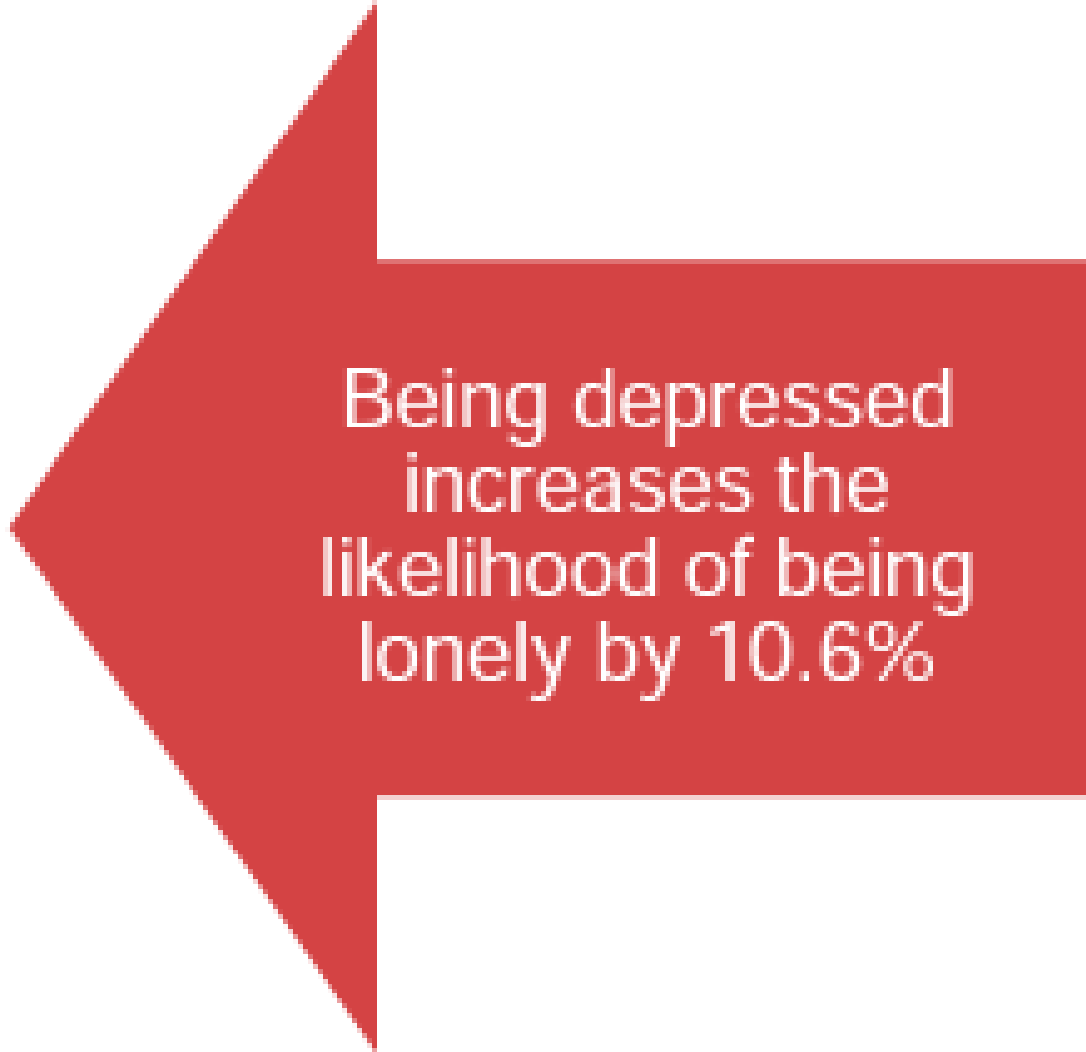
- affect our ability to think
- affect the body's immune system
- affect our ability to regulate stress
- impact on mental health



- Reducing loneliness can have health benefits
(Lim, 2018)



Loneliness increases
the likelihood of
experiencing
depression by 15.2%



Being depressed
increases the
likelihood of being
lonely by 10.6%

Taken from the Australian Loneliness Report

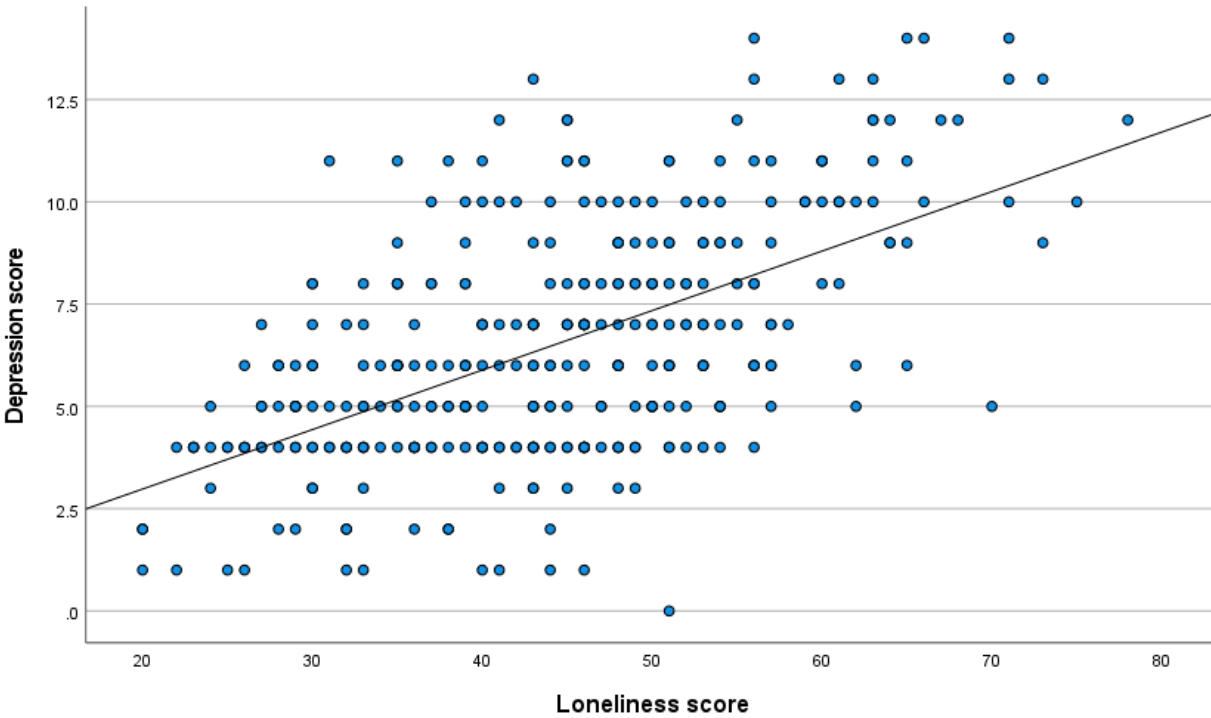


<https://www.nari.net.au/befriendas>

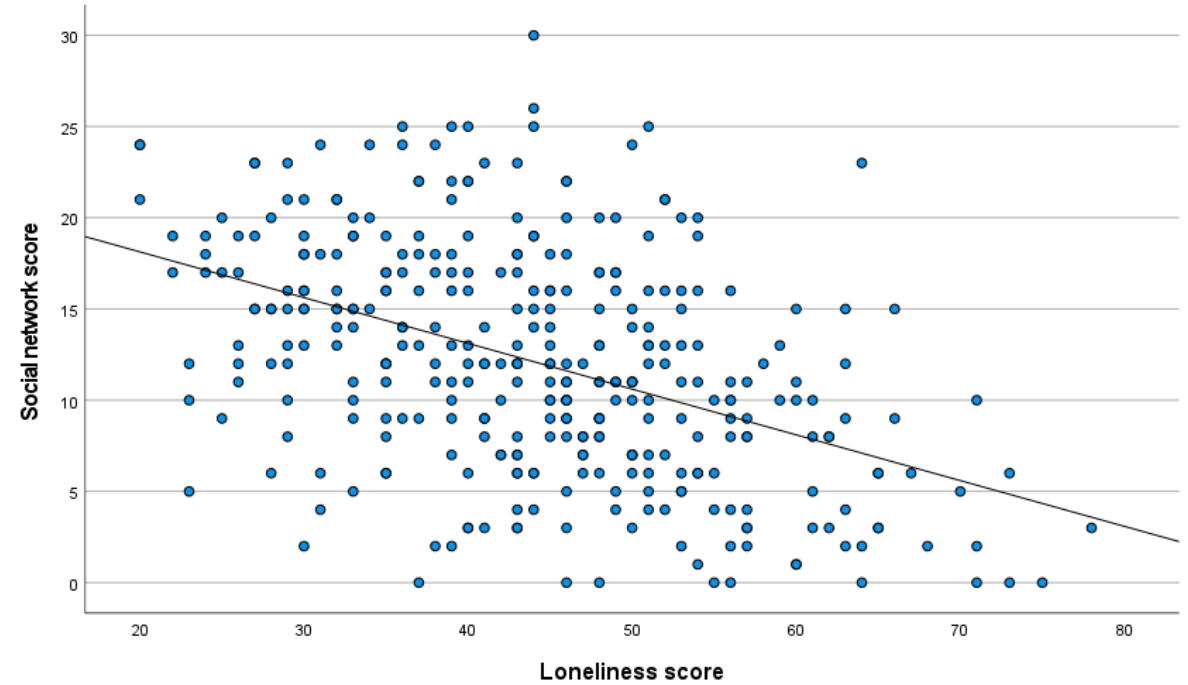
Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials
Registry:

[http://www.ANZCTR.org.au/ACTRN12619000
676112.aspx](http://www.ANZCTR.org.au/ACTRN12619000676112.aspx)

What is associated with loneliness?



Pearson R = 0.575, n=346, p<0.001



Pearson R = -0.455, n=346, p<0.001

What is associated with loneliness?

Gender

Males had a higher mean loneliness score than females
 $t(343)=2.12, p<0.05$

Age

Younger old (60-79y) had higher mean loneliness score than older old (80+y)
 $t(344)=2.02, p<0.05$

Benefits of befriending

“I love visiting John...It’s not just in the immediate time that is spent with that person. People have told me they feel quite euphoric and happy for a few days after the visit.”

“It’s good because it gives yourself and also the person you’re visiting, it gives you both a sense of purpose that maybe your lives didn’t have before”

“It’s nice to have a visitor. I mean my brothers visit. It’s nice to have a visit from someone younger. She was more extraverted than him. She helped me open up a bit. I’m quite introverted at times. She helped me talk about myself.”

“I felt very close and so did he to me and he said 'friends' the first day when he shook hands and he left.”

“I think it’s made me a little bit better...when there’s no one around I used to just sit there and do nothing. Not talk to anybody or anything...I’ll really tell you, she’s very very helpful. Oh yeah (made me feel) much better...I always ask her when she’s coming back.”

“As you get older, you don't have a lot of friends to make contact with...It's beneficial and I feel comfortable in her company.”

What else can people do to help prevent or reduce loneliness

- Support and maintain existing connections
 - Stay connected with family and friends (either online or offline)
- Support new social connections
 - Stay busy and keep up with hobbies, or find a new one, or join a social group
 - Try to get out as much as possible
 - Stay active and try community exercise groups
 - Volunteer
- Support mental health and wellbeing
 - Good sleep patterns and nutrition
 - Mindfulness
 - Talk to a professional

Summary

- Loneliness can have an impact on your physical health
- Loneliness can have an impact on your mental health
- There is a strong correlation between loneliness and depression
- The association between loneliness and depression may be mediated by social support
- Interventions that improve social support, such as befriending, may break the link between loneliness and depression

Participants

Volunteer befrienders

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Beyond Blue

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