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How being active can tackle loneliness in older Aussies

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 Posted by: admin

The health benefits of exercise cannot be overstated. We all know that being active helps to keep improve your physical and mental well-being, but did you know it might be able to help fight loneliness?

We all know that exercise is good for us, and this is especially true as we age. The National Physical Activity Guidelines (<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines>) state that those over 65 should accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days. Older people should be active in as many ways as possible. This includes a range of physical activities that incorporate fitness, strength, balance and flexibility. These guidelines apply to all Aussie seniors, regardless of age, weight, health problems or abilities.

The benefits of exercise for older Australians

Exercise has a myriad of health benefits for seniors. 4 in 5 older Australians (80%) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4364.0.55.001~2017-18~Main%20Features~Chronic%20conditions~25>) are living with at least one chronic condition (like heart disease or diabetes). So, for the older demographic, being active is especially vital in both prevention and management of chronic diseases. Being active also helps to keep bones healthy and reduces your risk of developing osteoporosis (<https://exerciseright.com.au/best-exercises-osteoporosis/>). Lastly, by helping to keep you strong and flexible, exercise helps to reduce falls risk. This can help to maintain your independence as you age.

But regular exercise isn't just good for your body. Research has repeatedly shown that it plays a crucial role in brain health, especially as you age. With the prevalence of conditions like dementia and Alzheimer's disease on the rise, the impact of exercise on cognitive function and memory have been extensively analysed. Studies have shown that the hippocampus (the memory centre of the brain) is often larger in people who are more active. As little as 10 minutes of exercise can have a positive impact on cognitive function in older adults.

Read more: Can high intensity exercise fight off dementia?
(<https://exerciseright.com.au/high-intensity-exercise-dementia/>)

And let's not forget the benefits of exercise for mental health! Movement triggers the release of "happy hormones" which helps to improve mood and reduces your risk of developing mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.

Overall, it's fair to say that the evidence for exercise is conclusive.

But there is one benefit is often forgotten, and that's the impact of exercise and physical activity on loneliness.

Loneliness in Australia

In Australia, 1 in 2 adults report feeling lonely

(<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/social-isolation-and-loneliness>) at least once a week, with older Australians most prone to experiencing loneliness. Loneliness is a negative feeling that arises when someone's social needs are unmet by their current social relationships. It can be harmful to both mental and physical health and is a significant health issue because of the serious impact it has on people's lives.

Research has shown that being lonely can increase your risk of early death (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691614568352>) by as much as 26%. Another meta-analysis (<https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1000316>) which looked at almost 150 studies found that individuals' experiences within social relationships significantly predict mortality, and the overall effect corresponds with a "50% increase in odds of survival as a function of social relationships". This means that the risk of premature death associated with social isolation and loneliness is similar to that associated with well-known risk factors such as obesity and smoking.



The social benefits of exercise

It's well known that being active, especially in a group environment, is a great way to improve mood and mental health (<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/43/8/608.short>). Research is also starting to acknowledge the power of physical activity as a means to reduce individual and community isolation. Movement brings people together and can help to reduce feelings of loneliness.

Success of group exercise programs like Parkrun and F45 show that more people are turning to movement as a way of interacting with others. These types of programs can really help to create a sense of community.

With older Australians increasingly susceptible to loneliness, being active is a great way to improve feelings of social connection. Engaging in a community walking group or group exercise classes are great ways to meet new people and stay active at the same time. There's an ever-growing number of senior's health classes available, and we highly recommend giving them a go.



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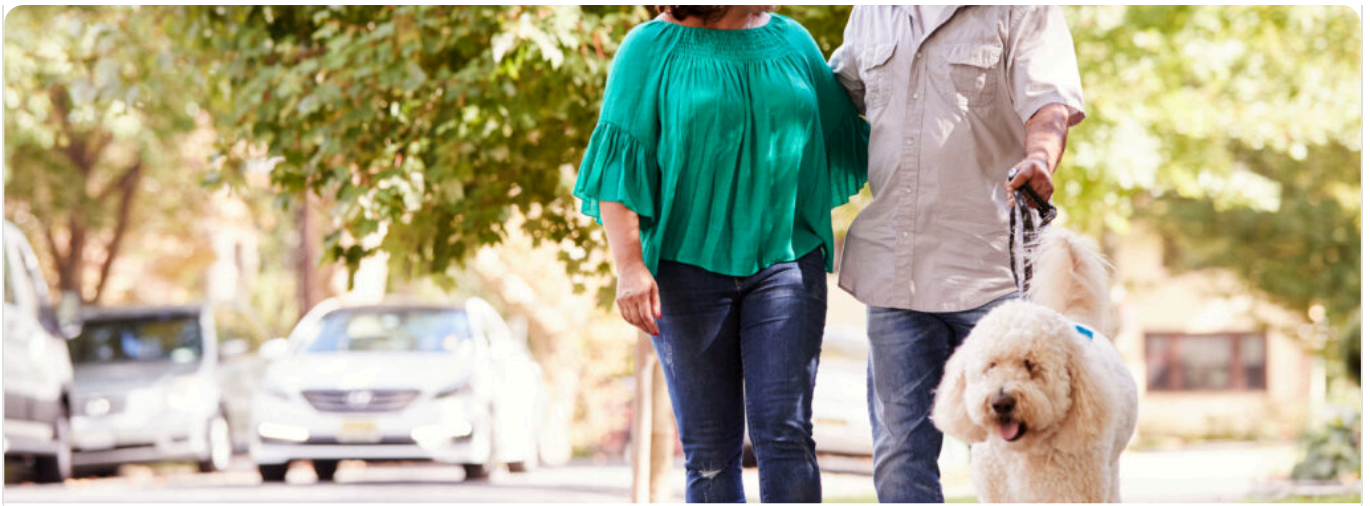


How exercise can help people living with dementia

This article was written by Alister MacInnes, Senior Exercise Physiologist and Exercise Scientist at The Biomechanics. Dementia is one of the most significant health and aged care issues facing Australia, and it is now the leading cause of death in the country.¹ In 2026, an

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Young onset dementia and exercise: Where to start and why it matters

This article was written by Nicholas Lawlis, Accredited Exercise Physiologist and Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Centre for Ageing Research and Translation at the University of Canberra. Being diagnosed with dementia before the age of 65 is not what

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