



## Avoiding loneliness and creating connection

In a world of always-on social media and digital connectedness, it seems almost inconceivable that loneliness could become a health crisis affecting up to one in four Australians. Unfortunately, following the pandemic, 25% of Australians are lonely. The impacts of loneliness and social isolation can be far reaching with links established to varied health issues such as anxiety and depression, development of dementia, poor physical health, poor sleep, and high blood pressure.

The 2022 KMPG report, Connections Matter, found that loneliness is a significant factor for poor physical health, decreased quality of life and is associated with 26% increased risk of mortality.

Loneliness can affect anyone. However, there are some groups that are more susceptible than others. Young adults are at particularly high risk, with 37 – 50% of people aged 18–24 reported to be lonely. Parents, particularly single parents, older people and people who live alone are also more impacted. It is also an issue among minority groups. First Nations people, those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and migrants experience higher levels of loneliness compared to national averages.

Fortunately, it's in everyone's power to stave off loneliness and develop social connections.



## Volunteering and getting involved

The emerging field of social prescribing recognises the huge mental wellbeing and physical health benefits of connecting patients and the community. But, you don't have to wait until you're unwell to get the benefits.

There are plenty of ways through which you can build connection – consider your interests and you'll be able to find a group of like-minded people who enjoy the same thing. Volunteering is the perfect way to make friends, give back and boost your mental health.

Popular volunteering activities include helping the local sports club, getting involved with ParkRun, supporting your local school, joining the community shed or garden, or assisting organisations such as OzHarvest, Red Cross, Salvation Army, FoodBank or St Vincent de Paul Society.

### Benefits of volunteering

- It helps improve emotional wellbeing as you are in participate in activities involving social interaction.
- It can give you a sense of self-confidence and boost self-esteem.
- Frequent conversations with community members help reduce depression and anxiety caused due to loneliness and social isolation.
- Participating in physical activity sessions also keeps you physically fit and energetic.

For more information about volunteering groups in your areas talk to your local government or go to Volunteering WA at [www.volunteeringwa.org.au](http://www.volunteeringwa.org.au) or Volunteering Australia at [www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)





# How can you keep your brain healthy?

- Learn something new, whether it's an academic interest or a new skill such as a musical instrument, dancing, woodwork, or quilting, it'll keep neurons firing and making connections in your brain.
- Regular cardiovascular exercises help boost blood flow to the brain, which is essential to keep the brain healthy.
- Quit smoking! Research has revealed that smoking increases the risk of cognitive decline.
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet. A meal low in fat and high in fruits and vegetables can help maintain a healthy brain.
- Being socially active boosts brain health. Get involved in social activities like volunteering, fundraising, group yoga and park runs.
- Strategic, cognitive activities such as building a piece of furniture, completing a jigsaw puzzle and playing board games and riddles can have a positive impact on brain health.



## Try these brain exercise riddles!

1. You come to a cold winter cabin and realise you only have one match. In the cabin, there is a fireplace, a kerosene lamp and a candle. What is the first thing you light?
2. If you have five apples on a bench and you remove two, how many apples do you have?
3. A man built a square house where all four sides were facing south. If a bear walked past, what colour would it be?

(Answers at the end of the recipe)

If you know somebody who is struggling with their brain health, suggest them to visit their general practitioner (GP).



## Stuffed sweet potatoes with chipotle and lime yogurt

Warm yourself up with this amazing low-calorie recipe, perfect for a cold winter night!

Serve 4. Cooking time 50 mins.

### Ingredients list

- ▶ 4 small to medium sweet potatoes
- ▶ 2 tbsp olive oil
- ▶ Freshly ground black pepper
- ▶ 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- ▶ Half teaspoon dried chipotle chili powder
- ▶ 1 tbsp fresh lime juice
- ▶ 1 cup cooked black beans (drained and rinsed, if canned)
- ▶ 1 avocado, cubed
- ▶ 2 tbsp chopped coriander
- ▶ 2 tsp chopped fresh chives

### Method

- ▶ Preheat the oven to 200 c and line a baking tray with a sheet of aluminium foil.
- ▶ Place the sweet potatoes on the tray and bake until fork-tender (40 to 45 minutes).
- ▶ Remove from the oven. Slice the potatoes lengthwise into two halves. Fluff the flesh with a fork when still hot.
- ▶ Drizzle a tbsp of olive oil and a pinch of salt and pepper into each potato and mix well.
- ▶ For your yogurt dressing, add chili powder and lime juice to your yoghurt and stir.
- ▶ To serve, add 2-3 tablespoons of black beans, one tablespoon of the cubed avocado, fresh coriander and chives on top of each sweet potato.
- ▶ Drizzle some chipotle-lime yogurt and freshly ground black pepper to enjoy.



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