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**HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER**

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DECEMBER 2020

First aid for Christmas Loneliness

It's not unusual to feel lonely, and there's no time like the holiday festive season to highlight these feelings. But if you're dreading Christmas, there are steps you can take to ease your loneliness.

There have been a number of studies across the world about loneliness. According to many of these studies, in countries and areas like the US, Japan, the EU and Australia, the number of those feeling lonely and isolated ranges from 22 per cent to 54 per cent. And the loss of social connection during this year's COVID-19 pandemic has been reported as the most common personal stressor in a recent survey. But loneliness doesn't strike us equally. You're more likely to feel lonely if you're in your early 20s, over 65, a single parent, or unemployed.

How lonely you feel may also depend on how you feel your social life should look. "In a lot of younger university age groups, loneliness is very socially constructed, and people feel lonelier on Saturday nights than on other nights of the week," Elisabeth Shaw, CEO of Relationships Australia NSW, told abc.net.au.

Then there's Christmas. If anything is going to trigger feelings of loneliness, it's

the season that comes with expectations of happy families enjoying gifts and celebrations. Maybe you don't want to spend time with your family, for a whole range of reasons. Or perhaps your family live far away, you've had a recent relationship break-up, lost a loved one, or you're experiencing a mental illness that makes the holiday season particularly isolating.

If you're facing Christmas with a sense of loneliness or dread, there are steps you can take to help alleviate those feelings.

Plan ahead

If you're going to spend Christmas alone, allow plenty of time for the things you enjoy. When you're taking good care of yourself, you're more likely to be positive and those feelings of loneliness may have less power to get you down, says Sane Australia. What makes you feel good? It could be spending time in nature, cooking something special or pampering yourself.

Give back

Volunteering is a great way to support people who are going through a difficult time, says Beyond Blue, and it can also be a good thing to do if you don't want to be on your own. Despite restrictions on gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there may still be opportunities to serve a meal at a community centre, take gifts to a children's hospital, or attend a religious service.

Get support

If you're feeling alone or lonely, reach out and talk to someone, advises Beyond Blue. This can be as simple as sending a text, a message on social media, inviting someone over for a drink or cuppa, or making a phone call. You can also go online and connect with an online community for support, such as those run by Sane Australia and Beyond Blue. Depending on where you are, a quick Google search on "support for loneliness" may bring up some more locally relevant results. ✕



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December 3 is International Day of People with Disabilities, a day to share the message of inclusion and diversity for people with a disability. More than a billion people worldwide are living with a disability. Read more about this annual event here on the website idpwd.org.

Can you **thrive** on a **vegan diet**?

Vegan options on every menu, vegan foods in every supermarket, and most of us probably have at least one friend who's a vegan. Vegan eating is more popular than ever, but can you meet all your nutritional needs if you avoid all animal foods?



Once considered fringe, vegan eating is one of the most in-vogue dietary trends. About one per cent of the world's population identify as vegan, which means they don't eat any foods of animal origin including meat, fish, eggs and dairy food. While this may seem a small number, it has been increasing rapidly over the past few years.

Sales of meat-free and dairy-free foods are booming, with even fast food chains cashing in by offering vegan options. It's predicted that the global vegan food market will be worth US\$24.3 billion by 2026.

Why are plants becoming so popular?

A Mintel survey in the UK found health, weight management, animal welfare and environmental concerns were the big motivators for people to switch to vegan eating. There's plenty of evidence that eating more plant foods – vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts, seeds and wholegrains – coupled with a reduced consumption of animal foods, is good for our health, reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some

cancers. But you don't have to become vegan to eat more plants. Along with full-time veganism, flexitarianism – part-time vegetarianism or veganism – is also becoming more mainstream.

Eliminating all meat, fish, dairy and eggs from your diet will mean cutting out valuable sources of nutrients. So, if you're following a vegan diet, can you meet all your nutritional needs?

Yes, you can, says US vegan dietitian Brenda Davis, a leader in the field of vegan nutrition. But you need to plan. One of the mistakes vegans make, she says, is ignoring the nutrients of concern. You need to make sure that the main nutrients found in foods you're no longer eating – meat, fish, dairy and eggs – are being replaced by plant sources.

Clare Collins, professor of nutrition at the University of Newcastle, agrees. She says vegans must pay strict attention to what they eat and understand food better than the average omnivore or even vegetarian.

What are the nutrients you need to watch out for if you opt for a vegan diet?

Vitamin B12

This is an incredibly important vitamin but one that's only available from animal foods such as meat, fish, dairy and eggs, or in the form of supplements. Trace amounts may be found in some plant foods such as mushrooms that may be contaminated by soil or insects, but these are not reliable sources, says Davis. "The only reliable sources for vegans are supplements and fortified foods," she says.

"You don't want to end up with a B12 deficiency," says Professor Collins. B12 is vital for making DNA, fatty acids, red blood cells and neurotransmitters – chemicals that pass signals around the brain.

While a deficiency may manifest first as vague symptoms like light-headedness and tiredness, it can progress to mood changes like depression and nerve problems like numbness, pain and loss of taste and smell.

Iron

Iron deficiency is the most common nutritional disorder in the world. This



essential mineral is best known for its role in transporting oxygen around our bodies in red blood cells, so if you're deficient you're going to feel tired and lethargic, lack the ability to concentrate, and have a lowered immunity to any bug going around.

Plants do contain iron — it's found in foods like legumes and beans, seeds and dried fruit — but it's in a form that isn't as well absorbed as the iron found in meat. This means vegans and vegetarians are more at risk of deficiency if they are not careful with their diet. One simple way to help your body absorb more plant iron is by including a source of vitamin C with your meal. Vegetables like red capsicum and broccoli, and fruit such as oranges, kiwis and strawberries all contain good amounts of vitamin C.

Professor Collins also recommends avoiding cups of tea immediately after meals. "The tannins and the phytates in the tea actually interfere with the absorption of the iron," she says.

Calcium

Calcium is important for bone health, heart health, muscles and nerves. Dairy foods provide a rich source for omnivores so if you don't replace dairy foods with calcium-rich plants, your body will 'steal' calcium from your bones putting you at risk of osteoporosis (brittle, weak bones) later in life. One important study, the EPIC-Oxford

study, found that vegans who consumed less than 525mg calcium per day had a 30 per cent increase in fracture risk compared to non-vegetarians. Calcium-rich plant foods include tofu, low-oxalate greens (such as broccoli, bok choy, and kale), calcium-fortified non-dairy drinks, almonds, sesame seeds (tahini), and figs.

Long chain omega 3 fats

Omega-3 fats are particularly important for the health of your brain, eyes and cell membranes. The most well-known sources include fish and seafood, which are rich in two types of omega 3 fats called EPA and DHA.

Plant foods typically only contain another type of omega 3 fat called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) which our bodies must convert to EPA and DHA. But this conversion process is quite inefficient, which means that you must eat a good amount of ALA-rich foods to get enough omega-3s.

If you're switching to a vegan diet, make sure you have plenty of chia seeds, hemp seeds, walnuts, and linseeds (flaxseeds). You can use chia seeds and ground linseeds as egg substitutes in baking. You may also want to consider a supplement of algal oil, which contains EPA and DHA, particularly if you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

Note: If you're following a vegan diet, it's worth mentioning it to your GP so they can check for any early sign of deficiencies, particularly B12 and iron. ✕

'Vegan' foods not always healthy

The amount of meat substitutes sold globally — such as pork-free bacon, tofu-based sausages, and vegetarian burgers has experienced rapid growth in the past ten years and is set to surpass US\$6.5 billion by 2026. But just because a food product is labelled 'vegan', doesn't mean it's healthy, warn researchers. These foods may be plant-based, but just like regular packaged, processed foods, some come laden with added salt, found a study by the George Institute for Global Health in Melbourne.

Meat-free bacon was the worst offender, followed by some brands of falafels and meat-free sausages. One vegan pie brand contained half the daily recommended salt intake. Eating too much salt is linked to high blood pressure, which affects more than 1.13 billion people and is a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

The researchers recommend reading a product's label carefully before buying, or sticking with wholefoods like fruit, vegetables, grains, nuts and legumes.

How to make new habits stick

It's nearly the end of the year, and given the year we've had, many of us may be thinking about new healthy habits that we want to cultivate in 2021.

Maybe 2021 will be the year when you stress less, show more gratitude, save more money, cook healthy foods, exercise daily, or spend more time with friends and family.

While we start off very enthusiastically, it's easy for new resolutions to fall by the wayside. Positive behaviour change isn't easy, nor is it quick. British researchers found that it took an average of 66 days for a new task to become automatic.

We tend to blame ourselves and our lack of willpower when a new healthy habit fails to stick. This is an easy mistake to make, says B J Fogg, director of Stanford's Behaviour Design Lab, in his book *Tiny Habits*. "When it comes to changing our behaviours, the problem is that motivation and willpower are shape-shifters by nature, which makes them unreliable," he says.

"For example, your motivation for self-improvement vanishes when you're tired, and your willpower decreases from morning to evening."

Instead of relying on willpower and motivation, here are a few tips to help cement any new habit into your daily routine.

1. Don't be overly ambitious. Prioritise your goals and focus on one behaviour. Willpower is a finite resource and if you spread it too thin you risk not achieving any of your new healthy goals.

2. Tie your new habit to an existing one. For most of us, the morning routine is the strongest in the day and so is a great place to introduce a new habit that you can build on over time. Add a one-minute meditation practice to your morning coffee, for example, or do five squats while you wait for the kettle to boil.

3. Make change small, and doable. Making a large behaviour change needs equally large amounts of motivation that you're unlikely to sustain, says Fogg. Starting with a tiny habit can make the new habit easier, even when you're short on willpower. A daily short walk, for example, can be the start of your exercise habit, or putting an apple or small bag of nuts and dried fruit in your bag can be the start of better eating habits. While tiny habits can feel insignificant at first, you can gradually ramp up to bigger challenges and faster progress.

4. Make it easy. Clear the obstacles that stand in the way of your new habit. Wendy Wood, a research psychology professor at the University of South California, calls such obstacles 'friction'. She describes how to reduce friction she began to sleep in her running clothes, making it easier to roll out of bed in the morning, and go for a run. ✕

Ways to start out small

Here are some examples of tiny habits from author B J Fogg:

- After I brush my teeth, I will floss one tooth.
- After I walk into the kitchen, I will drink a glass of water.
- After I pour my morning coffee, I will open my journal.
- After I sit down on the train, I will meditate for three breaths.
- After I put my head on the pillow, I will think of one good thing from my day.

From [tinyhabits.com](https://www.tinyhabits.com)



Should you **put on a** happy face?

Sometimes it's a struggle to keep smiling at work. You may have had a particularly bad morning at home, or dreading a tough meeting ahead. How you deal those feelings at work can make all the difference to how well your day goes.

There's a kind of unwritten rule that we shouldn't express anger or frustration once we are at work. Of course, we should treat those around us with respect, but should we be faking optimism and positivity when underneath we're feeling nothing of the sort?

A team of researchers set out to answer this question by surveying over 2,500 employees from a variety of industries. Their findings, published this year in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, focused particularly on interactions with co-workers, and suggested that positivity has some real benefits. But they also showed that some attempts at appearing positive can backfire.

Surface acting versus deep acting

When we are faced with an unpleasant emotion we can choose to react in a number of ways, with two of the most common called 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'.

"Surface acting is faking what you're displaying to other people. Inside you may be upset, but on the outside you're trying your

best to be pleasant or positive," said lead researcher Allison Gabriel. It's really a kind of impression management, she explained, such as faking a smile to a co-worker after a bad morning, for instance, even though you're not feeling particularly positive inside.

If you're more of a surface actor, it can be emotionally draining to not be authentic, suggests Gabriel. "I think the 'fake it until you make it' idea suggests a survival tactic at work," she says.

But if faking a smile is bad, and you can't let your true angst show, what can you do?

The alternative is what's called 'deep acting' which is the process of closing that gap between how you feel and how you behave by altering your emotional state.

"When you're deep acting, you're actually trying to align how you feel with how you interact with other people," explained Gabriel. The study found the benefits of 'deep acting' included reduced stress, higher levels of trust and more support from co-

workers, and lower levels of fatigue.

How do you become a successful deep actor?

1. The first step is just paying attention.

Be aware when you're surface acting, take a step back, and try to genuinely feel the positive emotions you want to express with others, advises Gabriel.

2. Put yourself in the other person's shoes.

You may think your workmate's jokes are lame, but appreciate that maybe he's trying to bring some cheer to a Monday morning.

3. Be genuine. We can all pick up social cues and know when someone isn't being sincere. If you ask about a workmate's weekend, for instance, then listen to what they say and don't tune out their answer.

"Plastering on a smile to simply get out of an interaction is easier in the short run," says Gabriel, "but in the long term it will undermine efforts to improve your health and the relationships you have at work." ✖

Be safe around chemicals

Many workplaces need to use dangerous chemicals, which have the potential to harm your health. Wherever you work, don't be complacent around hazardous substances.

Chemicals are all around us, but they are not all dangerous. The food we eat, the plants we grow, the air we breathe, and the homes we live in are all made of various chemicals.

Hazardous chemicals are those that can have harmful effects on people. The health effects depend on the type of chemical and the level of exposure, and also how you were exposed to it. Chemicals can be inhaled, splashed onto the skin or eyes, or swallowed, and can cause poisoning; nausea and vomiting;

headache; skin rashes; chemical burns; lung, kidney or liver problems; nervous system disorders; and birth defects.

Hazardous chemicals can be in the form of a liquid, powder, solid or gas. Common hazardous chemicals include disinfectants, glues, acids, paints, pesticides, solvents, heavy metals (such as lead), and petroleum products.

Reducing your exposure

- First, make sure you know what chemicals are hazardous in your workplace. Any product in your workplace that has the potential to cause harm is required by law to have a warning label and Safety Data Sheet provided.
- Where possible, perform the task without using any hazardous chemicals, or substitute the substance with a less

hazardous alternative. You could use a detergent in place of a chlorinated solvent for cleaning, for example.

- Make sure you wear any personal protection equipment supplied, such as respirators, gloves and goggles.
- Ensure you attend training in the safe handling of any hazardous chemicals in your workplace.

Exposure to hazardous chemicals

If you suspect you've been exposed to a hazardous substance:

- If it's an emergency, dial emergency services for an ambulance.
- Otherwise, see your doctor immediately for treatment, information and referral.
- Notify your employer.
- Try not to handle the substance again. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q Should I drink 8 glasses of water a day?

Nutritionist Jenny Boss replies:

We've heard this message so often that it must be true, right? In fact, it's one of the most pervasive myths in nutrition. While we all need water to survive, the amount we need varies and depends on our body size, how active we are, the climate, and what types of food we're eating.

We get water from the tap, of course, but also from juice, soft drinks, milk, tea, and coffee. And if you're worried that your coffee habit will make you

dehydrated, rest assured that this is a myth, too. While the caffeine in coffee, tea and cola does have a mild diuretic effect, the water you'll lose is far less than the liquid consumed. The only drinks which are dehydrating are alcoholic ones.

We also get a lot of liquid from food. Many fruits and vegetables, for instance, are over 90 per cent water, while foods like yoghurt, soups, sauces, stews, and curries also contribute water.

Rather than trying to do a complicated

calculation of your water needs, let thirst be your guide. Don't allow yourself to get dehydrated, as this can negatively affect your mental and physical performance. If you're thirsty, have a drink of water and if you're having a day when you're particularly active or it's hot, increase the amount you're drinking.

Want another indication of your hydration status? Check the colour of your urine. If it's lightly coloured or clear, you're drinking enough. If it's dark, then you should drink a little more. ✕

App of the month

Peak

Play smarter and feel sharper with the brain training app Peak. Peak uses the latest research from neuroscientists and game experts to

create over 40 evidence-based games and puzzles that have been shown to improve cognitive skills. The free games will challenge your memory, attention, problem solving, mental agility, language, coordination, creativity and emotion control. Learn which categories you excel in, and compete with friends by comparing your brain map and game performance.

Available free with in app purchases from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

News Bites



A simple way to stay young

Want to stay young and beautiful, or at least delay ageing as much as possible? Then try to avoid ultra-processed foods (UPFs). UPFs are food-derived substances (such as oils, fats, sugars, and starch) that contain little or no whole food, offer minimal nutrition and often include many additives. Examples include soft drinks, chips, lollies, sweetened breakfast cereals, and instant noodles.

Spanish researchers have found that eating these foods might be linked to faster ageing. In a study of 900 people, published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, the research team found that those people who ate the most UPFs were more likely to have shortened telomeres (the small caps that protect the ends of your DNA), which is a sign of cellular ageing. They also had an increased risk of depression, high blood pressure, obesity and death from any cause.

The study can't prove cause and effect, say the authors, but it does show a strong association between ultra-processed food and telomere length. ✕

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Why am I a mosquito magnet?

Mosquitoes really are attracted to some people more than others, says Dr Cameron Webb, Clinical Lecturer and Principal Hospital Scientist at the University of Sydney.

Female mosquitoes bite us to get to our blood, he explains, because it's full of nutrients that will help develop their eggs. When they are on the hunt for blood, they will pick up on the amount of carbon dioxide you're exhaling – the more you exhale, the more likely you will be to be a target. They are also attracted to body heat and sweat, so even if you rarely get bitten, you're likely to be a target while exercising.

More than anything, however, it's the smell of your skin that attracts mosquitos, says Dr Webb. Hundreds of chemicals are sweated out or emitted by our body's bacteria, and the cocktail of smells created either attracts or deters mosquitoes. This is largely down to your genes rather than what you eat or drink.

But it only takes one mosquito bite to spread a pathogen that could make you sick, so even if you rarely get bitten, don't be complacent, and make sure you use insect repellents. ✕

Your brain protects you during sleep

Have you noticed that you don't sleep so well during the first night away in a strange place? Sleep researchers believe that there's an adaptive reason for this – your brain is trying to protect you. They've found that the left hemisphere of your brain remains more active and vigilant during the first night away from home, meaning you take longer to fall asleep and have poorer sleep quality. Researchers speculate that the first-night effect may be a protective mechanism to keep you alert to possible dangers in a strange place. Once your brain detects the danger has passed, your sleep returns to its normal pattern.

1

THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Sign up as a volunteer

More than 970 million people all over the world make a difference by volunteering each year, doing all sorts of tasks for a wide range of organisations. While signing up as a volunteer can make a difference to others' lives, it can also benefit your own, in the following ways:

1. You'll add purpose to your life. Volunteering give your life purpose and meaning, says Dr Tim Sharp, also referred to as 'Dr Happy' because of his pioneering work into happiness. "We feel good about ourselves when we're doing good to and for others," he says. Dr Sharp is backed up by the OECD Better Life Index, which says volunteers tend to be more satisfied with their lives because they're interacting with other people, setting and achieving goals, and learning new things.

2. You'll feel happier and healthier. People who give their time (or money) report being happier and healthier than those who don't. A 2007 study from Syracuse University found 'givers' were 42 per cent more likely than 'non-givers' to report being 'very happy'. The benefits don't stop with good mood. Helping others is also related to improved physical health, including lower blood pressure and relief from depression and chronic pain.

"When we're helping others we're more likely to feel good about ourselves which is, not surprisingly, a positive contributor to mental health," says Dr Sharp. "Mental and physical health are highly correlated so when we're psychologically well, we're also more likely to be physically well."

5 December is International Volunteer Day and is a chance for volunteers and organisations to celebrate their efforts, share their values and promote their work among their communities.

To discover volunteering opportunities in your area, google "Volunteer" and your country or city.

EAT SMARTER

Look festive without the booze

Most of us celebrate the festive season with a few alcoholic drinks. And after the year we've had, who could blame us for wanting to let our hair down and relax with a few beers or wines? While drinking to celebrate or relax can become a habit, fortunately there are now many alternatives to alcohol that can see you celebrating without the dreaded hangover or the other ill effects of too much alcohol.

From alcohol-free beer to non-alcoholic spirits, you now have plenty of choice when it comes to choosing your tipple.

Try this martini made from alcohol-free spirit, adapted from BBC Good Food.

Alcohol-free passionfruit martini

- 3 passion fruits, halved
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 egg white
- 100ml alcohol-free spirit
- 2 tsp sugar syrup or agave nectar
- Handful of crushed ice
- Sparkling grape or apple juice, to serve

Scoop the flesh from four of the passion fruit halves into a cocktail shaker (or jar with a tight lid). Add the lemon juice, egg white, spirit and syrup or nectar and shake vigorously until frothy. Then add the ice and shake again. Strain into two glasses. Top up the martinis with grape or apple juice and garnish with the remaining passion fruit halves, or pulp from the passion fruit.

Serves 2. ✕



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