

## SOCIAL ISOLATION

Extract from *While You're Waiting – Summer 2012*

Go to <http://issuu.com/racgp/docs/2011wywsummer> for the online source. You have to scroll through to page 20.

### ***Being older can be isolating.***

*Social isolation is estimated to affect 20% of older Australians. Professor Andrew Beer from the University of Adelaide is Chief Investigator of a new Australian study exploring ways to combat social isolation among older people. He said that ageing was "quite a socially limited process." When people are working he added, they "have a network of social connections, but when they depart from the world of work at around the age of 65, those connections disappear."*

*Older men and women are both vulnerable to social isolation for different reasons. "There is evidence that men are poorer at making social connections, but more women are socially isolated because women live longer," Professor Beer said.*

*Health effects of social isolation include insomnia, depression, a greater likelihood of developing dementia and elevated blood pressure. But adverse health effects can improve when people start to make stronger social connections. "There is evidence that if you go about re-establishing social connections, there is a positive benefit in terms of morbidity and mortality," Professor Beer said.*

*He also suggested that elderly people seek out opportunities within the community such as clubs and associations and consider joining Probus, church groups, bowling and croquet. There are also local government organisations and educational opportunities available to help older people be more socially involved.*

*Older people often don't recognise there is a cost to being socially isolated. "By choosing to be alone," Professor Beer said, "they cut themselves off from networks that can sustain them."*