



December 2025 Seasons' Greetings



Kia ora koutou - warm Christmas greetings to the Millhouse community and other readers.

The crimson Pohutukawa lining the streets of Howick and Pakuranga are in full bloom — such a beautiful reminder that Christmas and the summer holidays are just around the corner.

It's been another year of change and challenge for the Millhouse team. Dr Dan headed off to new adventures in Queenstown, and many of his patients expressed sadness. The vacancy for a new GP or Nurse Practitioner is being advertised and we remain hopeful of filling it.

Dan's departure placed extra demands on the clinic but I am grateful to our wonderful team for their commitment and teamwork during this period. Special thanks to NP Gabriella for stepping in when doctor appointments were full, and to Practice Manager Lisa for her steady support and oversight. The team has done an incredible job keeping things running smoothly and caring for our community.

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR HOURS		
Monday	December 22	open 8.30am-6pm
Tuesday	December 23	open 8.30am-6pm
Wednesday	December 24	open 8.30am-4.30pm
PUBLIC HOLIDAYS		
December 25-26-27-28 - closed		
Monday	December 29	open 8.30am-4.00pm
PUBLIC HOLIDAYS		
December 30-January 4 - closed		
Monday	January 5	resume normal hours.
At all other times & for emergencies please contact		
East Care A&E, 260 Botany Road		
Phone 277 1516		
For all Life-Threatening Situations		
Ring 111		

Christmas and New Year Opening Hours

Our team will be taking a short break over the festive season; Christmas and New Year hours are shown in the sidebar. Monday 29 December will be for urgent medical care only. The practice will then be closed on Tuesday and Wednesday. East Care A&E will provide urgent medical attention during the break, and normal surgery hours resume on Monday 5 January.

When was the last time you had an authentic face to face conversation?

Feature Article contributed by MMC team member Vivian Coleman.

A few months ago I read, in that highly respected scientific journal the Australian Women's Weekly, about the decline of real conversation. The writer recounted an incident at a Christmas do, where she had never met the people before (it was her partner's work gathering). Trying to engage in conversation with new people was a huge challenge. She found that it wasn't conversational tennis, it was hitting a ball against a brick wall! The people weren't being rude or unsociable: they just didn't want to engage in a two-way conversation. She started noticing this phenomenon in other contexts. Reflecting with her hairdresser, she heard about the apprentice who quit when her boss asked her to work on her small talk. And a friend who attended a two-day conference mentioned that no one asked about herself or her work. In a world of emails and engaging phone apps, emojis and voice memos, are we forgetting how to converse?

This piqued my interest, so I did a bit of reading. I found out that human connection is a basic social need. In her book *Let's Talk about Loneliness*, researcher [Simone Heng](#) tells us how social skills like eye contact and active listening are being undermined by other ways of communicating, and the result is burgeoning loneliness. In 2022 the [US Surgeon General](#) described social isolation as a pressing public health issue; he compared its damaging effect with smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Here in NZ, University of Otago [researcher Sharon Leitch](#) has shown that loneliness leads to higher levels of conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, , anxiety, depression, Alzheimer's disease and an overall weakened immune system.

Probably technology is to blame. Opportunities for meaningful social interaction have declined because we wear headphones when we are out and about. We order our coffee on an app and even if we do sit down for it, we scroll through social media or play Wordle. Just last year [researchers found](#) that children who have grown up with text-based conversation are not easily able to put themselves in others' shoes and even to notice their own feelings. Of course, we communicated in the written word before Twitter and Instagram, but today's reliance on text messages means we connect at our own convenience. This takes away the skills that happen when we sit round the table and engage in banter, even in boisterous debate. The article made me realise the cure for the loss of connection is to be intentional about engaging in conversation.

There's also a growing fear of saying the wrong thing; our political environment has become polarised so the communication is no longer a two-way street but more of a one sided soapbox. Having a real life conversation can feel like walking a tightrope; we tiptoe round not just politics but vaccine choices, gender, sexuality, crime rates and clothing sizes. We avoid some topics in case the exchange turns awkward; it very well may, but that's not always a bad thing. A 2024 study of hundreds of participants found that [strangers who discussed their political differences](#) had a more positive experience than they expected. That's because discussions that are informative can draw people closer together. The cure for the loss of conversation is to actively engage in conversation.

So how do we have deeper, richer conversations instead of relying on cliches? When you're breaking the ice with a new person, do away with the standard 'where do you work?' and for older folk, 'what was your professional area?' Try 'what's really inspiring you right now?' 'What are you working on these days?' 'What's a place you like to travel?' Inconvenience yourself by putting aside what you want to discuss; researchers find positive interactions can trigger [the release of oxytocin](#), a hormone associated with bonding, trust, and optimism, which can in turn enhance communication, collaboration, and empathy. Other feel-good hormones related to human conversations include dopamine, which builds trust and security. These conversations help alleviate the stress of modern life.

Lots of us know how to extend the standard 'How are you?' into 'How are you really?' But there are other conversation extenders:

1. Ask Open-Ended Questions.
2. Be Curious. ...
3. Find Common Ground. ...
4. Mirror the Other Person. ...
5. Find Mutual Interests....
6. Tell a Story

See [How to Keep a Conversation Going](#)

Time together on holidays can provide more space for conversation and the sharing of ideas. When we feel more relaxed, we can be more vulnerable and give a bit more of ourselves. We might end up talking late into the night, perhaps over good food or a glass of something, engaging with friends or family to a depth which rarely feels possible at home. After an adventurous day. meaningful conversations and heartfelt discussions often occur.

So put down your phone and step up your small talk; as Ted Lasso said, "*be curious not judgmental*".

As we welcome the New Year, consider new health habits that support wellbeing. Avoid ultra-processed and refined foods such as sugary cereals, soft drinks, packaged snacks, and takeaways. Eat a little less, slow down at mealtimes, and perhaps try intermittent fasting. Keep moving every day - a gentle walk or something more energetic. Prioritise sound sleep, manage stress in healthy ways, and steer clear of smoking or vaping. Cut back on alcohol, cultivate positive relationships, enjoy the sunshine for some vitamin D (without getting burnt!), and have fun. Here's to a happy, healthy year ahead! From all of us at the clinic, we wish you a safe, happy, and healthy Christmas and New Year.

Ma te wa

Dr Richard J Coleman

Ma te wa, Dr Richard J Coleman



December 2025 News