



THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

They're good for your health and well-being.

The value of healthy relationships¹

Are you a social butterfly? Or do you enjoy a bit more alone time? Either way, it's important to understand the value of your social connections. Whether it's close family or friends, or casual acquaintances, making and maintaining your social connections can make your life more enjoyable and help you maintain your health. It should be as much a part of your everyday life as exercise and good nutrition.

Why are social connections so important?²

Surrounding yourself with people who have a positive outlook – those friends who make you laugh and are there when you need them – can actually help you face life's challenges. The support you get from others can add to feelings of meaning and purpose in your life. And this can add to your resilience – the ability to bounce back after stressful situations.

- ▶ The more positive your relationships are, the better you'll be able to face life's challenges.
- ▶ Resilient people know that they can depend on the strength of their family and friends when the going gets tough.
- ▶ Your resilience is strengthened when you give and receive support.

Together, all the way.®





Building your social connections

There are many ways you can start building positive relationships.

- › **Volunteer.** Choose a cause that's important to you and get involved. You're sure to meet others who share similar interests and values.
- › **Join a gym.** Incorporating physical fitness into your day is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. You can make friends while you exercise, too. Look at gyms in your area or check the local community center. Join a running club, yoga group, volleyball team, etc.
- › **Go back to school.** A local college or community education course puts you in contact with others who share similar hobbies or pursuits. Consider adult education classes.
- › **Look online.** Social networking sites can help you stay connected with friends and family. You can also find groups to join in your area.
- › **Find a community.** Join a church, volunteer organization, arts organization, etc.
- › **Follow your interests.** Do you like to golf, swim or ski? Participating in activities you enjoy is a great way to connect with others.

Giving support is just as important as getting it

You count on your social connections for support, but they also count on you. A successful relationship is a two-way street. The better a friend you are, the better your friends will be.

Here are some suggestions for nurturing your relationships.

- › **Stay in touch.** Answering phone calls, returning emails and reciprocating invitations let people know you care.
- › **Don't compete.** Be happy instead of jealous when your friends succeed, and they'll celebrate your accomplishments in return.
- › **Be a good listener.** Find out what's important to your friends. Ask others about their families, jobs and interests. Don't always focus on your challenges or talk about yourself.
- › **Don't overdo it.** In your zeal to extend your social network, be careful not to overwhelm friends and family with calls, texts and emails. While sharing is important, be wary of "over-sharing" information that's personal or sensitive, especially with new or casual acquaintances and on social networking sites.
- › **Appreciate your friends and family.** Take time to say thank you and express how important they are to you. Be there for them when they need support.

Sources:

1. Harvard Health Publishing. "Staying connected can improve your health." Web (December 2017).
2. WebMD. "Social Connections - Topic Overview." Web (accessed February 20, 2018).



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