

5 Community

Social connections give support and pleasure, but did you know they also influence your health and longevity? Many studies have shown that satisfying relationships reduce health problems and extend our life, giving both quality and quantity to our later years.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Consider all the gifts of healthy relationships: shared jokes, comfort during sorrow, fun activities, hugs, someone who listens and gives good suggestions, etc. The bottom line is that even though relationships are hard work, they give us happiness.

We don't do well without connections. A significant study of over 300,000 people determined the lack of strong relationships was found to increase the risk of premature death from all causes by 50%. This is equivalent to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and greater than the risks of obesity and the lack of physical activity!

Scientists are still studying the biological

and behavioral factors that account for the health benefits of connecting with others. They've discovered that relationships relieve harmful levels of stress that adversely affects the heart, gut function, insulin regulation, and the immune system. Another consideration is that caring behaviors trigger the release of stress-reducing hormones.





7 Ways to Build and Keep Strong Connections

1

Make Relationships a Priority in Your Life

Just as all living things require water, food, and sunlight, so do thriving relationships. Make the choice to reach out and spend time with others.

2

Recognize What Relationships You Need

Depending on your personality, you may need a lot of friends or just one or two. The grocery clerk, hair stylist, and veterinarian can be counted in your social circle as well as your church community, golf buddies, and fellow hobbyists. Any human connection, big or small, enhances your well-being.

3

Have Someone You Trust

Consider this question, “If you were put in jail, for whatever reason, who would you call at two am to come and bail you out?” It would most likely be a person who you can count on, who you trust, and supports you during times of thick and thin. We all need at least one relationship where we can be vulnerable and be our truest selves.

These connections require extra attention but are worth the investment.



4

Be With People Who Encourage You to Grow

In addition to having a person who will bail you out of jail, find a person who cheers you on to be your best self. Who inspires you to try a painting class or keep walking on cold days? This person may be a role-model, a coach, or a teacher. They encourage you to try new things, keep practicing, and celebrate small steps forward.

5

Serve Others

Studies show that serving others boosts your health, happiness, and sense of well-being. Volunteering your time, energy, or money to help others doesn't just make the world better—it also makes you better. Service comes in all sizes and shapes so you can find what fits best for you. Choose an activity that creates connections with others and aligns with your passions.

6

Reacquaint Yourself

Retirement changes the balance of time you spend with your partner and can highlight the good and bad in the relationship. What you ignored as you rushed off to work, cannot be as easily ignored when you're now home.

Consider retirement as a new chapter in your relationship where you have time to reacquaint yourselves and make new plans for your retirement years. Take time to have regular conversations about this transition. Explore topics such as how you'd like to spend your day, when you'll spend time together and apart, what your expectations of each other are, and how you'll adjust responsibilities.

7

Express Love and Gratitude

In the notable book, *The 5 Love Languages*, Gary Chapman teaches us about five different languages or ways to express our love and gratitude. These five languages are: 1) words of affirmation, 2) gifts, 3) acts of service, 4) quality time, and 5) physical touch. By recognizing the other person's love language and then expressing our caring with their language, we ensure they feel loved and appreciated in the relationship. You can also share your love language so they can reciprocate. (There are online quizzes that will help identify love languages.)

Summary

Every day take time to focus on your connections. They are essential to aging well, both mentally and physically. Nurture your relationships by using their love language. If

you're lacking connections for your needs, make the commitment to find new friends or deepen friendships you currently have.



“TRUE FRIENDSHIP MULTIPLIES THE GOOD IN LIFE AND DIVIDES ITS EVILS. STRIVE TO HAVE FRIENDS, FOR LIFE WITHOUT FRIENDS IS LIKE LIFE ON A DESERT ISLAND...TO FIND ONE REAL FRIEND IN A LIFETIME IS A GOOD FORTUNE; TO KEEP HIM IS A BLESSING.”

-Baltaser Gracian

