

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The relationships you develop over the years can influence many aspects of your life. Research has shown that social relationships are extremely important to the health and well-being for older adults. In the United States, social isolation and loneliness compromise the mental and physical health of many people. Lack of social relationships can be just as harmful to your health as smoking, obesity, high blood pressure, or physical inactivity.

Let's explore the importance of social connectedness, which is defined as the degree to which people have and perceive a desired number, quality and diversity of relationships. Social connectedness creates a sense of belonging, as well as feeling cared for, valued and supported.

Benefits of Social Connection

Social connections can positively influence your mind, body and behaviors. Social bonds can help to reduce some of life's hardships, lowering the risk of serious illness while instead promoting positive and healthy choices.

Social connections provide the following benefits:

- Can help prevent serious illness and poor health outcomes, like heart disease, stroke, dementia, depression and anxiety.
- Improved well-being and quality of life
- Enhanced resiliency to stress
- Reduced risk of violent and harmful behaviors

Improving Your Social Connections

Relationships are foundational pieces to living meaningful lives. Although there are no rules to improving your relationships, there are some simple steps you can take. Consider the following suggestions:

- **Establish and Maintain.** Creating a more diverse social network to engage with people that have different experiences than you can provide resources, information and opportunities. Joining a group of people with shared interests and values can create a sense of belonging and improve life satisfaction. To maintain these relationships, you should devote time and attention to contacting people regularly.

- **Be Considerate.** Show appreciation to the people in your life and provide support to them when needed. You'll be helping a friend and making yourself feel good too! Remember to be considerate of your well-being when caring for others.
- **Address Barriers.** Sometimes it is difficult to meet with people in person. Engage with others with a phone call, social media use or writing a letter. Overcoming barriers to communication can help you build high-quality, meaningful social connections.
- **Talk With a Healthcare Provider.** When you experience major life challenges, talking to your healthcare provider about your concerns about social isolation, loneliness and stress can be helpful. Your healthcare provider may be able to provide you with resources that will best assist you.

Evaluate Your Own Relationships

- What relationships do you value in your life?
- How have your relationships positively influenced you?
- How can you improve how you communicate with others?
- What kind of support would you like to receive from your social networks?