

Health Insights

October 2024

Connecting to Better Health

It's part of our nature to build relationships. In fact, millions of people in the U.S. experience chronic loneliness, which is strongly associated with lower self-reported physical health, mental health, and quality of life. It is also related to higher rates of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and suicide ideation. Establishing healthy connections goes beyond simply avoiding feelings of loneliness and isolation. Our relationships impact all dimensions of our well-being, including physical and mental health and our ability to flourish at work and in every other facet of life.

The Benefits of Interpersonal Connection

Because social connection is hard-wired into human behavior, it makes sense that our relationships (or lack thereof) significantly influence our well-being. Connections can be just as important to physical and mental health as exercise and healthy eating. Research has shown that the psychological and physical health benefits of social contact are so great that they could reduce the harmful effects of other risk factors and boost life expectancy.

Relationships can act as a buffer in difficult times. When things get tough, it helps to have the support of people who care about us—or at least know us well enough to listen and empathize. When we focus on cultivating deeper connections (including those with people whose opinions differ from our own), we are better able to recognize and accept our similarities and differences, which fosters empathy and self-awareness. These connections also expose us to new ideas and perspectives and help us be more authentic as we end our reliance on others to tell us who we are.

Our sphere of connectivity also extends to our work lives. At the organizational level, a connected workforce is a stronger one. Healthy work relationships facilitate greater learning and knowledge sharing, improve retention and engagement, and increase innovation and performance. On an individual level, people who have a sense of belonging at work are more likely to thrive in their jobs than those who are treated as cogs in a larger machine. However, in many cases, it's our attitude toward workplace connections and our hesitancy or willingness to put effort toward cultivating them that holds the greatest influence on our sense of belonging.

University of California, Berkeley . (n.d.). The importance of connections on our well-being. Berkeley Exec Ed. executive.berkeley.edu/thought-leadership/blog/importance-connections-our-well-being



Creating Meaningful Connections

The quality of our connections with one another can boost general happiness and decrease loneliness levels. Here are 6 tips to create more meaningful connections:

- **Start with honesty:** Some of the best conversations begin with honesty to break down barriers. Meaningful connections are driven by openness and vulnerability, both of which are best created from honest conversations.
- **Find common interests:** Relationships are often built from common ground. Explore topics like the arts, sports, or your favorite movies and TV shows. A shared love for something can evoke a mutual conversation topic and lead to a deeper connection.
- **Be mindful of others' needs:** Try something as simple as helping a neighbor carry their groceries or remembering details that friends share with you to show you care about their lives. Stay attentive to their simple needs including emotions, physical health, and overall wellbeing.
- **Ask worthwhile questions:** Building conversation up with simple yet deep questions can help create a comfortable space for both of you to open. Try sharing your dreams with your friend to show you feel comfortable discussing something important about yourself, inviting your friend to do the same.
- **Dive deeper into conversations:** While sometimes daunting, vulnerability can help improve the level of connections. It is not always about the depth of the subject, but rather the genuineness of your conversation that helps you both feel engaged and connected.
- **Be patient:** Friendships often happen over time. To create a meaningful connection, put in the time to consistently support one another. Building meaningful connections can be a long and challenging process. The more time two people spend together, the more likely they are to create a friendship.

Remember, if you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, please call 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Mental Health Moment

Exercise and Mental Health

Exercise is not only good for your body, but also for your mind. Exercise can improve mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and negative moods. There are many mental benefits to exercise:

Mood Boost: Exercise triggers the production of endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin—all of which are chemicals responsible for feelings of happiness.

Increased Energy: Increasing heart rate and oxygen circulation can make you feel more energized.

Better Sleep: Exercise helps regulate your sleep patterns and decreases the time it takes to fall asleep. Try to exercise a few hours before bed so your mind can wind down.

Reduced Stress: Exercise decreases the level of stress hormones in the body, like adrenaline and cortisol, and can even lower physiological reactivity towards stress.

Improved Memory: The endorphins that are released during exercise can enhance your concentration and mental sharpness.

Higher Self-Esteem: Exercise can help you feel more powerful and confident.

Stronger Resilience: Exercise is a healthy way to build resilience and cope with mental or emotional challenges instead of turning to negative behaviors, like alcohol or other substances.

If you're dealing with mental health challenges, try incorporating exercise into your routine with these tips: begin with short sessions and gradually increase them, find enjoyable activities to boost both body and mind, schedule workouts for when you have the most energy, and consider exercising with a friend to make it more enjoyable and help maintain your routine.



October Quiz

Korean Beef and Rice

Ingredients:

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tbsp sesame oil
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup low-sodium soy sauce
- ¼ tsp ground ginger
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (more or less depending on how spicy you like it)
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1 bunch green onions diced
- Cooked vegetables (broccoli and carrots) as desired

Directions:

1. Heat a large skillet over medium heat and brown beef and garlic in the sesame oil.
2. Drain most of the fat and add brown sugar, soy sauce, ginger, salt and pepper and red pepper flakes. Simmer for a few minutes to blend the flavors.
3. Serve over steamed rice and top with green onions.
4. Add cooked vegetables to make a well-rounded meal.

Calories: 273 kcal, Carbohydrates: 35 g, Protein: 18 g, Fat: 6 g

“Korean Beef and Rice.” Six Sisters’ Stuff, 3 July 2024, www.sixsistersstuff.com/recipe/korean-beef-and-rice/#wprm-recipe-container-112770. Accessed 6 Sept. 2024.

The Importance of Connections on Our Well-Being

1. Research has shown that the _____ benefits of social contact are so great that they could reduce the harmful effects of other risk factors and boost life expectancy.
2. Healthy work relationships facilitate what benefits?
 - a. Greater learning and knowledge sharing
 - b. Improved retention and engagement
 - c. Both A and B

Tips for Creating Meaningful Connections

3. What kind of common interests can you explore to build connections?

4. **True or False:** Meaningful connections are driven by openness and vulnerability, both of which are best created from honest conversations.

Mental Health Moment

5. Which of the following is a connection between exercise and mental health?
 - a. Improves cardiovascular health
 - b. Reduced stress
 - c. Muscle strengthening

Healthy Habits Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Welcome to October! Start this month's Connect 4 challenge.	2	3	4	5 Service Saturday: Spend a few hours volunteering at a local agency today.
6 Self-Care Sunday: Create a meal plan for the upcoming week.	7	8 Challenge Check-In: Sit with and get to know someone new in the lunch room.	9	10	11 Fun Friday: Try a new activity today. Have a friend teach you one of their favorite hobbies!	12
13	14 Columbus Day Motivational Monday: Decide on a goal to work on this week. Create a plan on how you are going to accomplish this goal.	15	16 Workout Wednesday: Try a new workout today.	17	18	19 Social Saturday: Plan an activity with friends this weekend.
20 Sort-Out Sunday: Take time today to clean out that space you have been putting off.	21	22 Tasty Tuesday: Try to recreate your favorite meal from your favorite restaurant.	23	24 Challenge Check-In: Who did you talk to today that you hadn't interacted with before?	25 Fitness Friday: Sign up for a fitness class this weekend.	26
27	28 Mindful Monday: Take 10 minutes out of your busy day to be still.	29	30	31		

30 DAY WELLNESS CHALLENGE

Office Connects 4



Your challenge for the next 30 days is to talk to 4 new people each week. If you feel like you already know everyone, reach out to people you don't talk to very often. By the end of the challenge, you will have a new or strengthened connection with 16 different people.

Record the name of the person you talked to:

WEEK 1	1)	
	2)	
	3)	
	4)	
WEEK 2	1)	
	2)	
	3)	
	4)	
WEEK 3	1)	
	2)	
	3)	
	4)	
WEEK 4	1)	
	2)	
	3)	
	4)	

Answers to Quiz:

Q1: psychological and physical health

Q2: c. Both A and B

Q3: sports, hobbies, books, entertainment, and more

Q4: True

Q5: b. Reduced stress