

CONNECTEDNESS

We are wired for connection.



Social connection is one of our fundamental human needs, and we need others to survive and thrive. In a time when we often substitute online communication with genuine connection, it is important to be reminded why social connection is critical to our well-being.

According to a sociological study from 1985, Americans claimed to have only three friends they felt they could confide in. In 2004 it dropped to one friend, with 25% of Americans saying that they have no one to confide in.

This suggests that 1 in 4 people that we meet may have no one they call a close friend.

Loneliness Kills

- Q Increases premature death by 14 years. (Winch, 2014)
- Q Nearly half of Americans are lonely at any one time. (Signa Health Insurance, May 2018)
- Q Social Media makes loneliness worse.
- Q Do you have a 4am friend - someone you can call in the middle of the night if necessary? (Seligman, 2011)

Why is talking about loneliness taboo?

"A deep sense of love and belonging is an irresistible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick. We are profoundly social creatures. We may think we want money, power, fame, beauty, eternal youth or a new car, but at the root of most of these desires is a need to belong, to be accepted, to connect with others, to be loved."

- Dr. Brené Brown

The decline in social connectedness may explain reported increases in loneliness, isolation and may be why studies are finding that loneliness represents one of the leading reasons people seek psychological counseling.

Those who are not socially connected are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, antisocial behavior, and even suicidal behaviors which tend to further increase their isolation. Most poignantly, a landmark survey showed that lack of social connectedness predicts vulnerability to disease and death above and beyond traditional risk factors such as smoking, blood pressure, and physical activity.

Eat your greens and exercise, **but don't forget to connect!**

TOGETHER WE CAN *build a better future!*

SEVEN KEYS TO STAYING SOCIALLY CONNECTED



WRITTEN BY UVM MEDICAL CENTER

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1 Set a routine. If getting together with friends or family happened sporadically before, try to be more consistent about getting together now. It's okay to say no to an invitation for coffee or getting together occasionally, but don't make it a habit.

2 Keep up with hearing and vision tests. People with an undiagnosed hearing or vision problem often avoid social situations out of embarrassment and difficulty with communicating. Seek treatment as soon as you can to remove this barrier to connecting with others.

3 Share a meal. Dine with others whenever possible, whether with a church group, at the local senior center or café. Even going to a dinner on your own for a cup of coffee can be social. Sit at the counter and chat with your server, or simply watch all the coming and goings.

4 Volunteer. Doing something that helps others has a positive effect on how you feel about yourself. Schools, churches, nonprofits and charitable organizations all depend on volunteers for their survival and may be looking for extra hands and minds.

5 Develop a hobby. Besides providing a sense of purpose, many hobbies and interests are social in nature. Anything that involves a group, like playing bridge, can be socially healthy. Check with your local senior center, town recreation program, library or church for educational classes, one day seminars & activities.

6 Ask for help. When we ask for help, we give someone a chance to feel valued and keep ourselves engaged. Worried about getting up the stairs to that restaurant? Don't stay home. Ask a friend, family member or staff person to hold the door open or help you climb the stairs.

7 Offer to help someone else. Offer to pick up a few things at the grocery store, post letters, or pick up a newspaper for a neighbor who needs help. It will make both of you feel good and lead to additional interactions.

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