



IMPROVING WELLNESS WITH **SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS**

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WHAT MAKES US HAPPY?

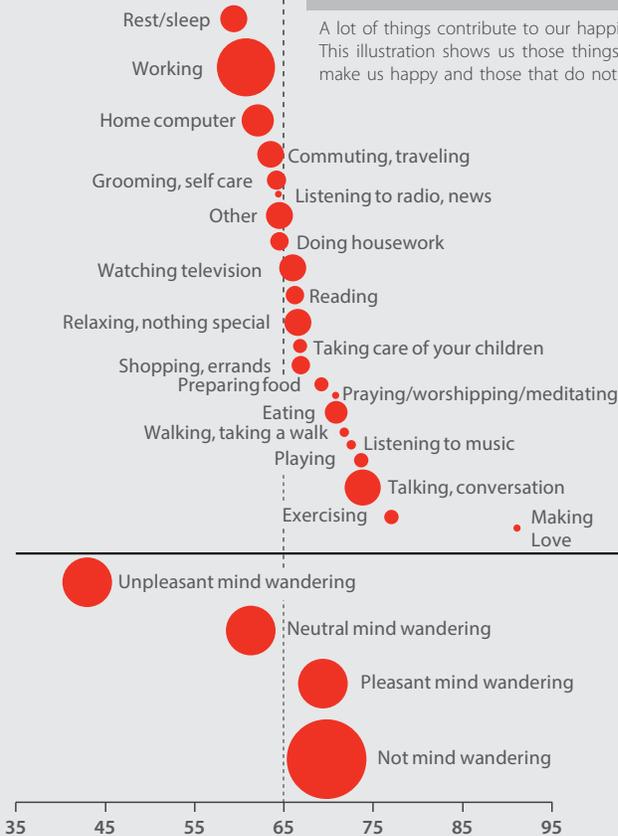


It is clear that connecting with friends, talking with them and engaging in social activities is a top wellness improving technique.



How Are You Feeling Right Now?

A lot of things contribute to our happiness. This illustration shows us those things that make us happy and those that do not.



0 = Very Bad ----- 100 = Very Good

Kittingsworth MA, Gilbert DT. *Science* 2010. vol 330:932

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HUMANS ARE AMAZINGLY SOCIAL CREATURES. REDUCING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS LEADS TO PROBLEMS.

SEEKING WELLNESS A Matter of Learning and Improving Our Skills

Several techniques improve overall wellness and this in turn helps us better fight off stress, depression, anxiety, etc. Social Connectedness is but one of these skills. Often, when we are faced with stress, depression or anxiety, we reduce our socialization. Guess what - this creates a vicious cycle that makes us feel more isolated, more anxious, and more depressed. We must make a conscious effort to change our Social Connectedness habits to prevent this from happening.

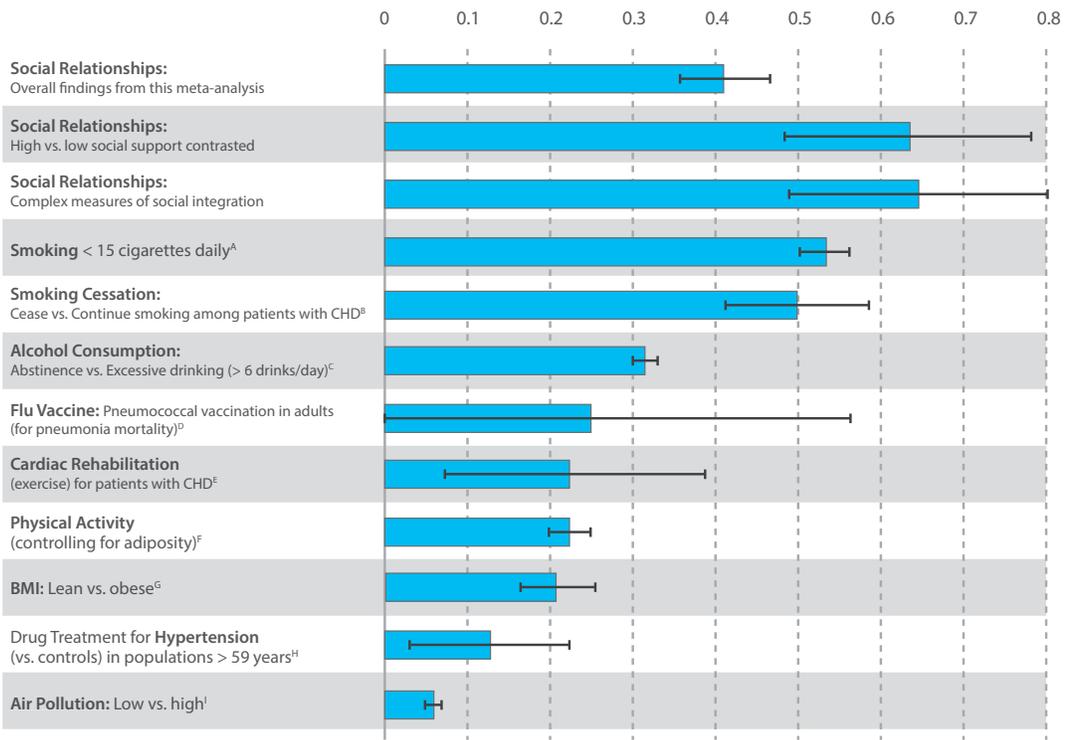
Looking at the Science of Social Connectedness



Our lives literally depend on our level of socialization. Find that hard to believe? If so, then please look at the illustration below that shows how powerful it is for us to be around and interact with people we like.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS HAVE A ROBUST EFFECT ON MORTALITY

Comparison of odds (lnOR) of decreased mortality across several conditions associated with mortality. Effect size of 0 indicates no effect. The effect sizes were estimated from meta-analyses of 148 studies that covered more than 308,000 people.

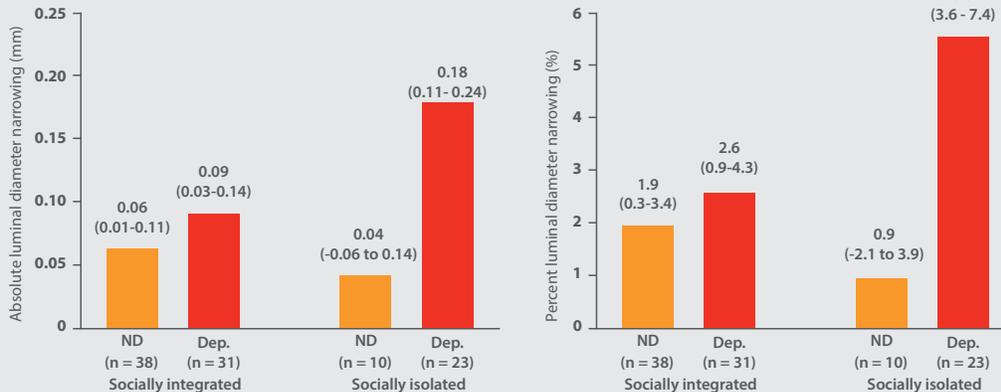


Holt-Lunstad J et al. *PLoS Med.* 2010; 7(7):e 1000316.

WHY IS THIS?

Well, it could be that being alone causes our body to have more inflammation causing all kinds of problems including damage to our heart vessels. Take a look at the study below:

SOCIAL ISOLATION, DEPRESSION, AND CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE



ND, <4 depressive symptoms; Dep., >3 depressive symptoms.

Wang HX et al. *Psychother Psychosom.* 2006; 75(2):96-102

Multivariate-adjusted absolute (mm) and percent (%) mean luminal diameter narrowing (95% CIs) over 3 years in relation to depressive symptoms and social isolation. Stockholm Female Coronary Angiography Study, 1991-1994. Multivariate mixed models adjusted for baseline diameter, age, smoking history, hypertension, and HDL.

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WHY PUT THE EFFORT INTO BEING MORE SOCIALLY CONNECTED?

Because it helps fight stress and depressive symptoms!

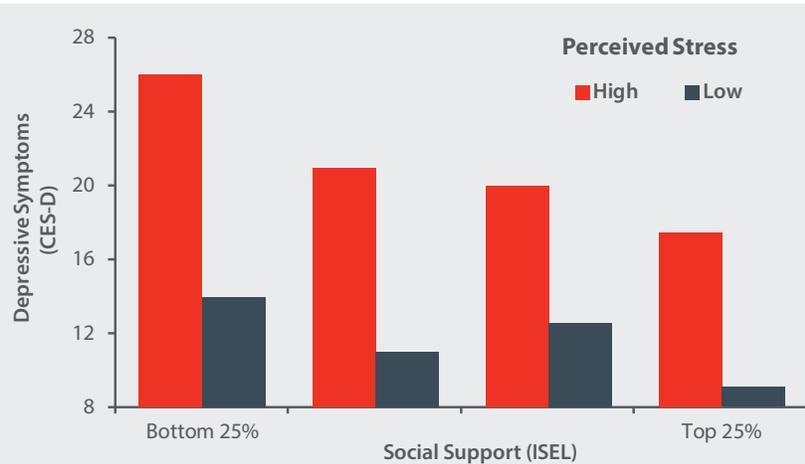


IT GENUINELY SEEMS HUMANS ARE SOCIAL ANIMALS. WHEN SOCIALIZATION IS REDUCED, WE END UP MORE STRESSED OUT AND DEPRESSED.

Please check out the illustration below. You can clearly see that the lower the social support an individual receives, the greater their perceived level of stress. It appears when we socialize more with family and friends, our troubles reduce, we manage stress better, our bodies are less inflamed, we sleep better, our anxiety is less and generally speaking, we just do better! Seems like a win-win proposition!



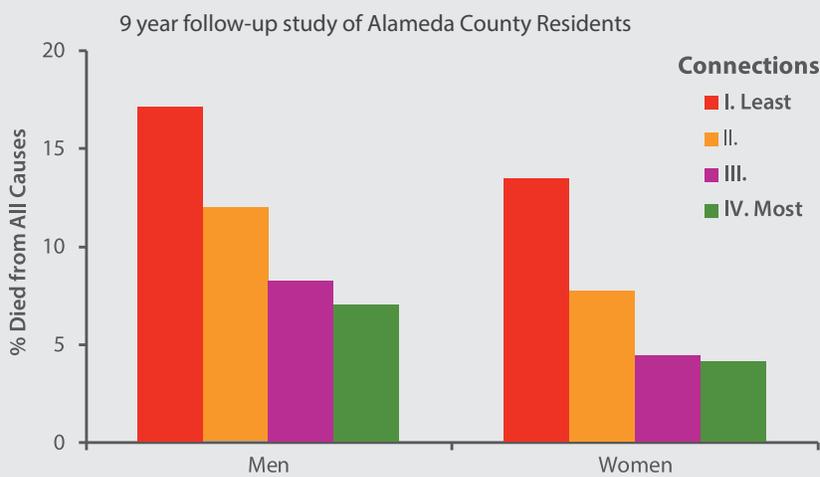
Social Support And Connectedness Has Effects On Psychological Stress And Depressive Symptoms



CES-D = Center for Epidemiological Study of Depression Scale
 ISEL= Interpersonal Support Evaluation Plan
 Cohen S. *American Psychologist* 2004. November. 676-684

DID YOU NOTICE THAT BOTH MEN AND WOMEN BENEFIT GREATLY FROM INCREASED SOCIALIZATION?

Does Social Connectedness Help Us Live Longer? Answer appears be ~ Yes!



Cohen S. *American Psychologist* 2004. November. 676-684



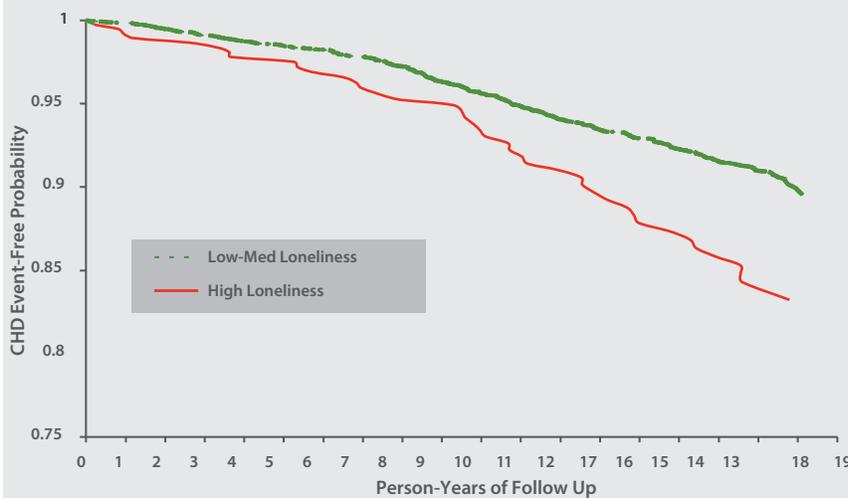


WHY WE (ALL OF US) CARE ABOUT SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS??

Harvery CS, et al. *Int J Soc Psychiatry* 2007;53;340.doi:10.1177/0020764006074529

"Social relationships during the course of illness are an important predictor of overall outcome and relationships with friends and family each seem to make a positive contribution."

Loneliness and Heart Disease in Women



Loneliness and incident CHD, adjusted for age, race, and gender.
CHD, coronary heart disease.
Thurston RC, Kubzansky LD. *Psychosom Med*. 2009;71(8):836-842.

NOW DO YOU SEE WHY SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS MATTERS?

When we don't socialize enough, it seems to hurt our mind and our body. To make sure this doesn't happen, we must socialize on a regular basis.



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS ACTUALLY INCREASES A PERSON'S WELLBEING

This is especially true when we socialize with people we trust and love and when we participate in deep and meaningful conversations.

Social Connectedness & Well Being: *Listening, Talking, Being with Others*

- EAR, Electronically Activated Recorder. Recorded 30 seconds every 12.5 min.
- 79 undergraduates wore this for 4 days.
- Talking coded as either small talk or substantive talk.

Look at the study to the left. It tells us that a "happy life is social not solitary and conversationally deep rather than superficial".



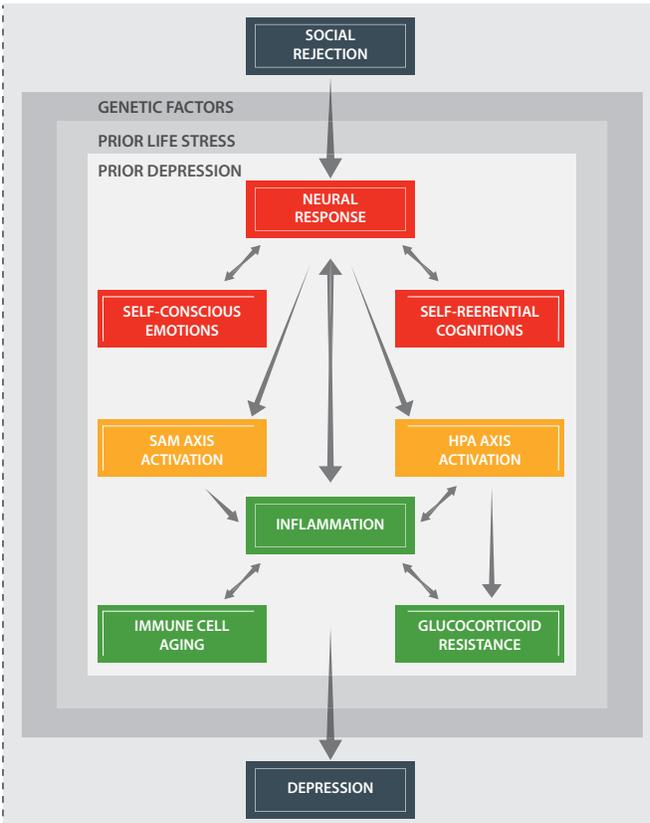
Findings:

- Higher well-being was associated with spending less time alone ($r=-0.35$) and more time talking to others ($r=0.31$)
- Higher well-being was associated with having less small talk ($r=-0.33$) and having more substantive conversations ($r=0.28$)

Mehl MR et al. *Psychol Sci*. 2010;21(4):539-541.

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Social Rejection, Inflammation, Depression



Please look at the diagram to the left.

ARE YOU SURPRISED THAT SOCIAL ISOLATION CAN BE THIS HARMFUL TO A PERSON?

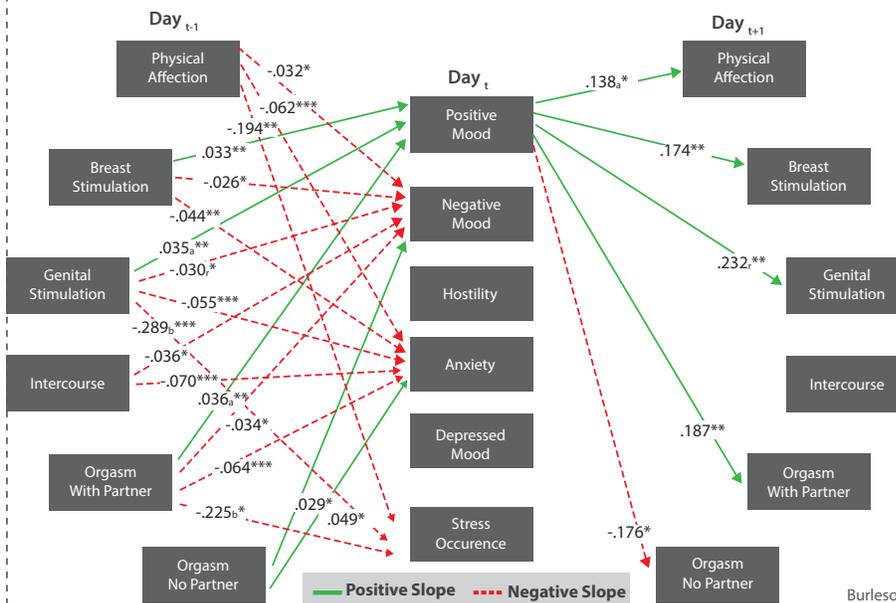
Please be highly aware of the negative consequences of social isolation and avoid it at all costs.

Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, sympathetic-adrenal-medullary (SAM) axis, and inflammatory response. Resulting increases in inflammation may be indexed by the proinflammatory cytokines interleukin-1 β , interleukin-6, and tumor necrosis factor- α . These cytokines are important because they induce a constellation of depressotypic behaviors called sickness behaviors. Although these changes can be short-lived, sustained inflammation may occur via several pathways, including glucocorticoid resistance, catecholamines, sympathetic innervation of immune organs, and immune cell aging. This response also may be moderated by several factors, including prior life stress, prior depression, and genes implicated in stress reactivity.

Slavich GM et al. *Neurosci Biobehav Rev.* 2010;35(1):39-45.

Never Underestimate The Power of Social Connectedness

Physical Affection Improves Mood and Reduce Stress



PHYSICAL AFFECTION, AS PART OF SOCIALIZATION, HAS A POWERFUL AND POSITIVE EFFECT ON US!

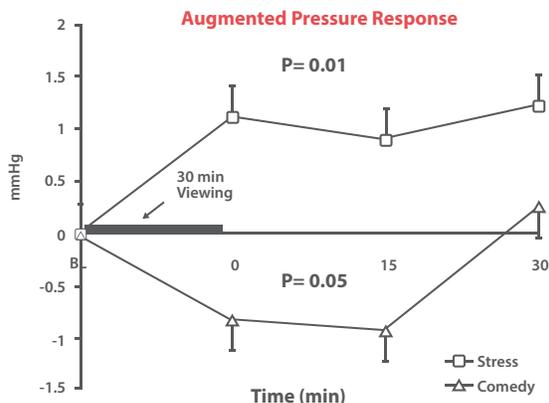
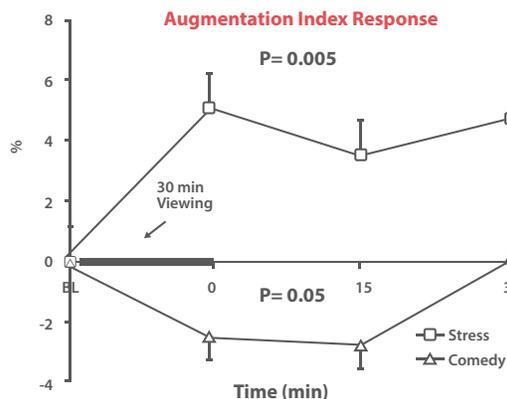
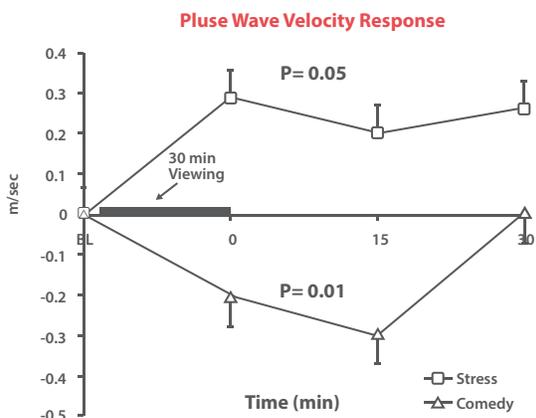
58 women (mean age=47.6 years) recorded physical affection, several different sexual behaviors, stressful events, and mood ratings every morning for 36 weeks. Summary of significant conditional (main) effects and unstandardized parameter estimates from prospective analyses. Coefficient for positive mood predicting next-day affection or sex is average of coefficients for 4 separate models, each including positive mood along with 1 of the negative mood indicators. *P<0.05, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001.

Burleson MH et al. *Arch Sex Behav.* 2007;36(3):357-368

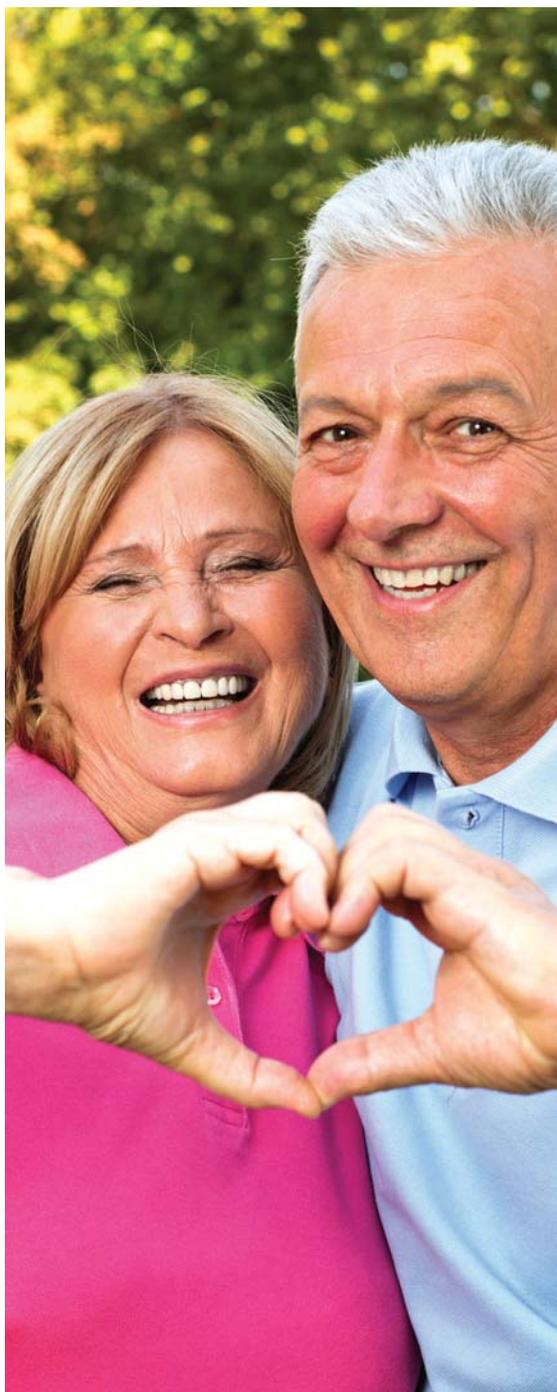
Laughter, Stress, and Arterial Function

Pulse wave velocity, augmentation index and augmented pressure responses. Each line represents response defined as net laughter/stress effect minus sham procedure effect at each time point. *P* values refer to the response of laughter/mental stress compared with sham procedure during the whole study duration. Error bars depict standard error of the mean (SEM).

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE FILLED WITH **LAUGHTER AND FUN** ARE PARTICULARLY GOOD FOR US!



Vlachopoulos C et al. *Psychosom Med.* 2009;71(4):446-453.



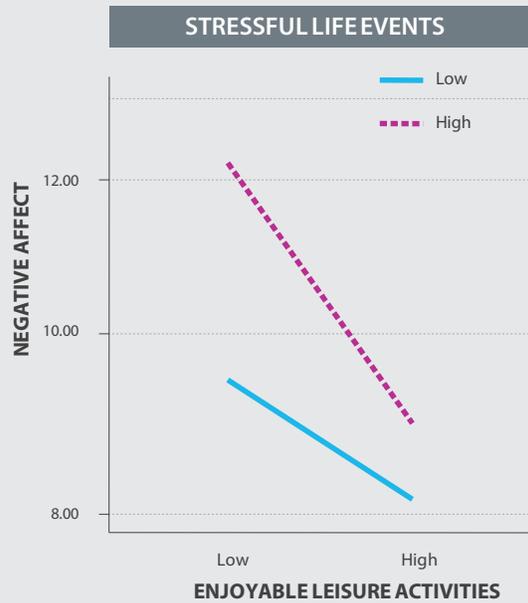
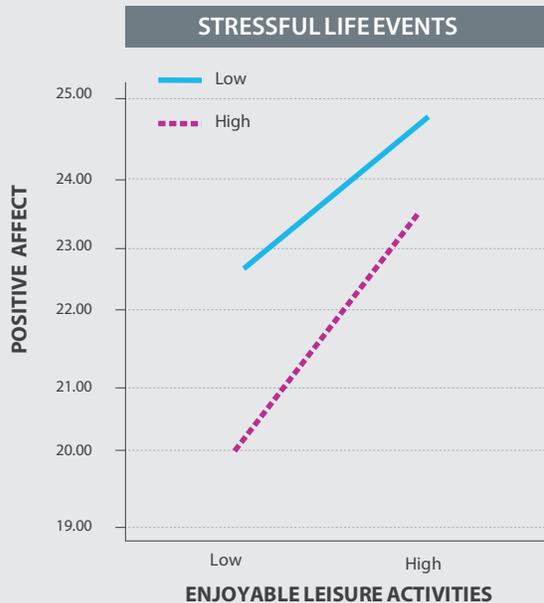
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IMPROVING WELLNESS WITH SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS



SOCIALIZING WHILE DOING FUN THINGS TOGETHER MAY BE THE BEST TYPE OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY OUT THERE!

Enjoyable Activities May Be Associated with Psychological and Physical Well-Being



Pittsburg Enjoyable Activities Test (PEAT) was used to assess leisure activities in 1,399 participants. Higher PEAT scores were associated with lower blood pressure, total cortisol, body mass index, and levels of depression and negative affect.

Pressman SD et al. *Psychosom Med.* 2009;71(7):725-732.

Want A Great Way To Connect With Others And Make A Difference? Try Volunteering!



Don't have time to volunteer?

Maybe you will rethink that decision because the benefits of volunteering far outweigh the challenge of finding time to make it happen. Studies abound on the benefits of volunteering including it's a great way to make friends and connect with others, many report an increase in overall happiness, improved physical health, greater self-esteem and self-confidence – the list is very long. Please don't miss out on an act of service that provides many personal benefits but also benefits others

Take 5-10 minutes to research volunteer opportunities in your area. Call and/or visit three places that look interesting and then sign on the dotted line and begin volunteering!



MY VOLUNTEER PLAN



1

2

3

DO YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS?

Let's give it a try! Consider the Rule of Two Q's – Quantity & Quality.

We can utilize the Q2 plan to maximize the benefits we receive from being socially connected.



RULE #1: QUANTITY

How often we socialize is very important. It seems that socializing on a daily basis is ideal. Duration doesn't seem to matter – brief interactions make a difference. Consider a phone call, emailing or texting someone or get together with a friend or family member.

Avoid socializing **JUST** once or twice a week, just on weekends, or on special occasions. Commit to making **DAILY** contact with others. You'll definitely benefit and enjoy the process.



RULE #2: QUALITY

The quality of the people you connect with makes a difference. Avoid toxic relationships or those that violate your personal boundaries. Connect with those that enrich and nourish you.

The quality of a relationship is measured by many things so let's keep a few of those in mind including the level of happiness and positivity the person possesses. Are they negative or upbeat and positive most of the time? Consider the strength of the bond you have with them. Are you able to have meaningful conversations that don't end in blaming and shaming? Seek out others that are fun and love life. All these elements help us determine the quality of the relationships we pursue.



“True friendship is like sound health; the value of it is seldom known until it is lost”
Charles Caleb Colton



PLEASE TAKE SOME TIME AND THINK ABOUT YOUR CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS.

How would you rate the quality of your primary social contacts?

How often are you socializing on a weekly basis? Taking a hard and honest look at these questions will help you decide how you want to modify and improve your relationships. If you feel your relationships are toxic or harmful in some way, you may want to consider discussing this with your healthcare provider and/or consider seeing a psychotherapist to address these issues. You may find it helpful to jot down some notes to the questions below:

1. How often do I socialize?

2. I'd describe the quality of my friendships/relationships as:

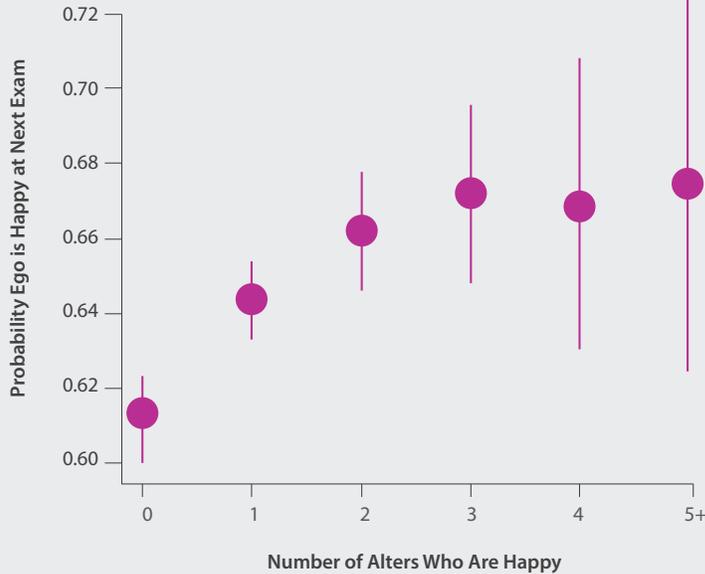
3. I consider these relationships/friendships as toxic:

4. How can I improve these relationships/friendship?



LET'S LOOK AT A FEW MORE STUDIES ABOUT THE POWER OF SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

More the Merrier? Yes!

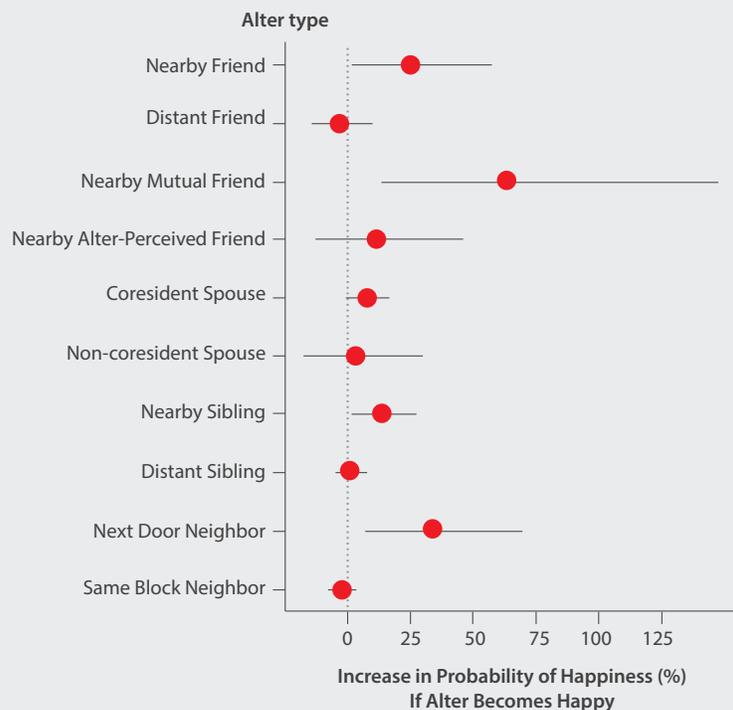


Having about 4-5 strong, close, meaningful, positive relationships in our lives really impacts our happiness!

Each happy alter increased the probability of being happy by 9%
Each unhappy alter decreased it by 7%

Fowler JH, Christakis NA. *BMJ*. 2008;337:a2338.

Types of Social Connectedness and Happiness



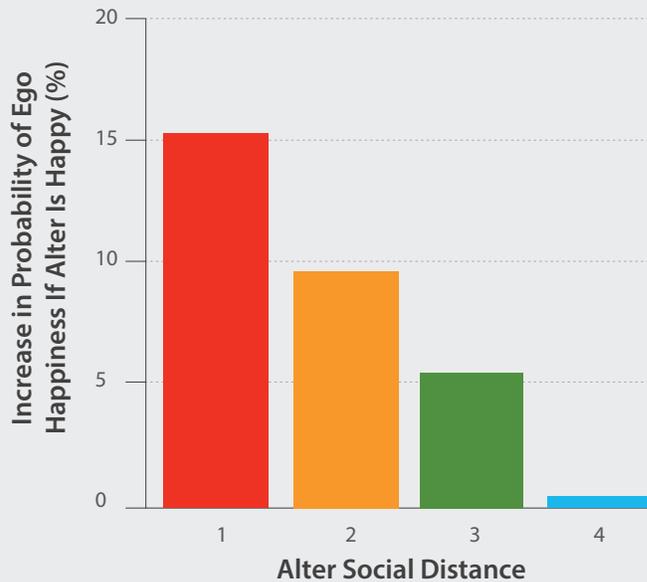
Having friends of our own gender that live close to us is also very important.

- Nearby friend (within a mile) = happiness probability increased by 25%
- Distant friend = no benefit
- Mutual friend = 63% increase
- Siblings = if near 14% increase
- If distant = no benefit
- Coworkers = no benefit
- Happiness spreads significantly more via same gender relationships than opposite-gender relations (P=0.02)

Fowler JH, Christakis NA. *BMJ*. 2008;337:a2338.

HERE ARE A FEW MORE STUDIES TO CONSIDER

Social Connectedness & Happiness, It's Infectious?



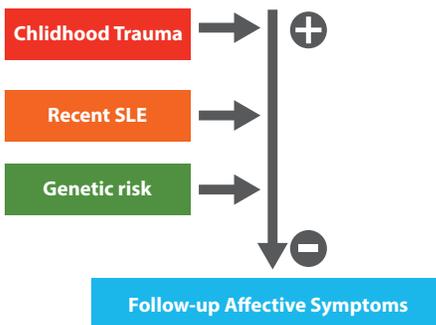
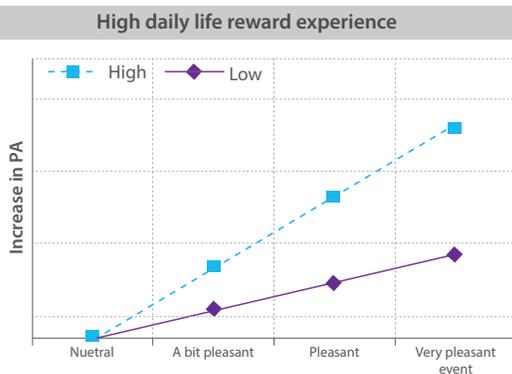
Happiness is "infectious"! It's the right kind of infection that we pick up when we're around happy social connections.

HAPPINESS CHANCES INCREASE:

- 15.3% if directly connected to happy person
- 9.8% if distance is 2
- 5.6% if distance is 3
- NS after that.

Fowler JH, Christakis NA. *BMJ*. 2008;337:a2338.

Daily Reward Experience May Be a Source of Resilience



We brush our teeth daily So, why not socialize on a daily basis? This goal makes sense and it is extremely beneficial.



Daily life reward experience and expected relations with follow-up affective symptoms. People with high reward experience are able to generate stronger positive affect (PA) boosts in response to pleasant events than people with low reward experience. Higher daily life reward experience is hypothesized to be associated with less follow-up affective symptoms, i.e., those with higher levels of childhood trauma, recent stressful life events (SLE), and genetic risk.

Geschwind N et al. *Acta Psychiatr Scand*. 2010;[Epub ahead of print].

MY ACTION PLAN

Please discuss action plan with your healthcare provider



1. Assessment of my current socialization practices:

2. Roadblocks to being more socially connected:

3. Ways to deal with these roadblocks:

4. List three social activities you would enjoy:

5. My plan to develop better social connectedness practices:



“ I would rather walk with a friend in the dark,
than alone in the light. ”
Helen Keller



