



**The Year of
CONNECTION**



Why Connection?

When asked what you need to do to connect to your health, you might list off basic needs like movement or fueling your body with nutritious foods. We know the basic answers like the back of our hands but how many of us consider just how crucial something like social connection can be to our overall health?

Human connection is defined as “when two or more people engage in vulnerable interactions where each person is heard, seen, known, and valued”. That drive to connect with other people is part of our human nature.

Those who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression, higher self-esteem, and a greater ability to feel empathy for others. Having access to social connections allows us to be more trusting and cooperative, allowing others to feel safe and begin to trust and cooperate with us. It also influences our physical health. Having more connections with others can strengthen your immune system, recover from sickness faster, and may even lengthen your life. How cool is that?



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Hannah has been part of the Healthy Lifestyles team since February 2023. She is passionate about creating an accessible place to learn about health & wellness and loves connecting with each of you. She believes that connecting to your health and wellness should be exciting not scary. You can find her at the rock climbing gym, up in the mountains, or cuddled up with a good book after work. Say hi next time you see her around!

Ways to Connect

- **Express gratitude**

It has been proven that expressing gratitude helps us form and maintain close connection. It is nice to feel appreciated!

- **Ask someone: “How are you really?”**

Some of the best moments of connection begin when we open up to each other about who we really are and how we are really feeling. Asking questions like this allows space for emotional intimacy to grow.

- **Send a funny meme**

Feeling connection over humor and silliness is one of the best ways to start a new connection or reach out to a past one! If you send a meme to a coworker, make sure it's work appropriate!

- **Go on a walk together**

Synchronizing your physical movements with another person has been shown to release hormones related to connection. Take a walk in the park or invite a friend to Zumba!

- **Celebrate others**

Celebrating each others good fortunes helps us build trust as we show each other that we care about each other's lives.

No way is the right way! Find methods of connection that feel meaningful to you personally and help you feel seen.



We all lead busy lives. It is hard to find a balance between end-of-year performance reviews, kid's Christmas recitals, catching up on your latest audiobook, and eating enough vegetables. With so much on our plate, our social connections can often be the first thing we opt out of. In America, our independence is built in as part of our cultural identity. We “pick ourselves up by our bootstraps” and often feel like we are left to figure out things alone. The stress of this disconnection has been proven to contribute to negative effects on our health.

Recent research shows that loneliness is on the rise and that lack of connection with other human beings can be more harmful to our overall health than obesity, smoking, and high blood pressure ([House et. al, 1988](#)). It also greatly affects our mental health, leaving us with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and addiction.

Embracing connections can be as simple as joining a chess club, frequenting a nearby coffee shop on Saturdays, or getting a membership at your local Rec Center. Connecting with others may even be as easy as getting to know your coworkers on a deeper level. Making an effort to connect to loved ones that may be far away is another way to nurture our need for human connection. So, schedule a phone call or video chat with someone who may not be close in proximity but is still dear to your heart. Nurturing these connections is vital to our overall well-being.

How can I deepen my connections?

UC Berkeley gave the following great guidance for deepening your connections with others:

- **Know your values and what you need from your relationships.** This will help you determine which connections are worth your time and energy.
- **Be proactive.** Forming authentic connections with others takes time and consistency.
- **Reflect on your interactions.** Which feel most authentic, generate positive emotions, and are most fulfilling? Try out those types of interactions more often.
- **Be authentic and honest in every interaction.** Understand that you do not always have to be ‘on’ or appear a certain way. Authenticity is the key to genuine connection.
- **Recognize that everyone has different connectivity needs.** If a relationship never grows beyond ‘acquaintance level’ or just isn’t working, it’s okay. Don’t force it.

We all need each other. Hopefully, our Year of Connection can help ignite the spark of connection within you as we learn about connecting with ourselves, others, our health, and the world around us. Happy New Year!



“A person's life may be a lonely thing by nature, but it is not isolated. To that life other lives are linked.”
— Haruki Murakami