

## Why good friends are important

Source: Lumino Health

You strive to be healthy. You eat your vegetables, hit the gym and get plenty of sleep. But do you have enough good friends you can count on?

Good friends can help you live longer, [studies have shown](#). In fact, social connectedness might be as important to our health and longevity as our body weight and exercise habits. By some measures, having strong friendships could extend your life [as much as quitting smoking](#).

### Why do we need friends?

Good friends help us cope with stress and work through our problems.

They also matter for other reasons too – like sharing a laugh. [Laughter can](#) relieve stress, boost your mood and even help your immune system function better.

Evidence suggests that whether we need more friends or better friends depends on our life stage.

In our [twenties](#), quantity seems to matter more. But in our thirties, the quality of our relationships starts to become more important to our well-being.

Then later in life, after about 50, the quantity of friends that we have may affect our health once again. Good friends are important to a long life. For example, one study found that having more friends seemed to protect somewhat against [inflammation and high blood pressure](#).

The reasons for these shifts may depend on what surrounds us during different stages of our lives. During the middle of adulthood, we may have a spouse, kids, parents, colleagues and many others in our lives – and the quality of those relationships matters most to our well-being.

Whereas when we are younger and older, we may not have the same established ties that come with work, family and community. We are more susceptible to social isolation and maintaining connections is critical.

### Are we motivated or discouraged by feeling alone?

When it comes to feeling motivated to make new friends and find connections, there might be a sweet spot, Chen's study suggests.

There were two groups with different reactions to their sense of connectedness: those who felt *a little* bit behind on making friends, and those who felt *way* behind.

The students who felt a little behind made more friends by the end of the year. Those who felt way behind made fewer by comparison.

“Maybe it’s discouraging, if you feel that everybody else has so many more friends than you do, and you might feel hopeless to remedy the situation,” Chen says.

On the other hand, if you feel like you are behind, but not that far behind, you might be motivated to try harder.

### **Take the leap – make new friends**

The lesson? Know that if you are struggling socially, you are not the only one, Chen says. Plus, it’s worth making the effort to build and maintain strong friendships. “If you’re on the fence about whether to strike up a conversation with somebody, just go ahead and do it. Because odds are they could use another friend too.”

Meeting people doesn’t look the same during the COVID-19 pandemic. But we can still stay connected virtually and find ways to get involved. Here are some ideas to meet new people:

- Volunteer for a cause you care about. You can do this remotely or volunteer with an organization providing services for COVID-19, as long as you do it safely.
- Join a group class to learn something new. Online classes provide an opportunity to learn from those with similar interests and make new connections.
- Join a club! Check out websites such as [Meetup](#) where people are hosting virtual gatherings, including book clubs and general chats.

*Measures put in place to help contain the spread of COVID-19 are gradually changing. Please remember to follow public health directives for gathering and social distancing in your region.*