

“Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.”

- **Helen Keller**

This is such a great quote because it's so true. Having a friend by your side in the darkest of times helps shine a little light to help you find your way when the path isn't clear. True friends are hard to find and there's really nothing on this earth more prized or important than real friends. They're the people who give you the freedom to be yourself and are the ones who know all about you and still like you. I can't imagine where I would be today if it weren't for a small handful of my close friends. They've shown me joy when I was feeling down and given me strength when I was feeling weak. I've learned over the years that if you have a friend who is comfortable being silent with you in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with you in a time of grief and who can tolerate not knowing details, but can just be there for you, you're truly blessed. As rare as it is to find true love, I think it's even more rare to find a true friend who you can trust implicitly. The world can sometimes be a scary place, but real friends can give you the courage to help navigate it and get you through to the other side of whatever it is you're going through. Shared joy is doubled. Shared grief is lessened. That's what friends do.

Yours in health,

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Why Friendships Matter



I'm veering from my typical health-related newsletter to focus on a different topic that's still vitally important for our health. In this digital age, it's easy for friendships to go by the wayside. But they're vitally important to our health. There's a positive association between the quality of our friendships and the overall satisfaction with our lives. Yet somehow, friendships can get neglected and for our own health (and sometimes sanity) we must figure out how to make them more of a priority.

In today's fast-paced world, it's really easy to underestimate the importance of friendship. Between busy schedules, work demands, family/relationship responsibilities and endless digital distractions, genuine human connection can fall to the bottom of the priority list. Yet the reality is that strong friendships aren't simply *"nice to have"*. They're **ESSENTIAL** for our emotional, mental, and even physical health.

Friendships enrich our lives in countless ways. They provide comfort during difficult times, help celebrate our successes, help us laugh through difficult times, and remind us that we're not alone. In many ways, friendship is actually one of the most powerful forms of medicine available to us.

Friendship and Mental Health

One of the greatest benefits of friendship is emotional support. Life inevitably brings challenges: from illness, to loss, to financial stress, to relationship problems, to moments of uncertainty. Having trusted friends to talk to can make those burdens feel lighter.

Studies have shown that people with close social connections are less likely to experience depression, anxiety, and chronic stress. Friends provide perspective, encouragement, and reassurance during difficult periods. Even a short phone call, a quick get-together, or a heartfelt text message can significantly improve someone's mood and outlook.

Friendships also help combat loneliness, which has become a growing public health concern. Loneliness is more than simply being alone. It's ultimately the feeling of being disconnected or unsupported. Long-term loneliness has been linked to increased rates of depression, sleep problems, and cognitive decline. Meaningful friendships create a sense of belonging and emotional safety that we all deeply need, whether we know it or not.

Friendship and Physical Health

The impact of friendship goes far beyond emotions. Strong social relationships can actually improve physical health and increase longevity. People with supportive friendships often experience lower blood pressure, reduced stress hormone levels, better immune system function, improved heart health, better sleep quality and faster recovery from illness.

In fact, some studies suggest that social isolation may carry health risks comparable to smoking or obesity. Humans are wired for connection and we respond positively when we feel we're supported and that someone cares. Friendships can also encourage healthier habits as they can motivate one another to exercise, eat healthier, or avoid harmful behaviors. Sometimes having a workout partner or someone checking in on us regularly can make all the difference.

The Importance of Friendship

Friendship is important throughout every stage of life. In childhood and teen years, friendships help teach us how to develop communication skills, empathy, confidence and emotional resilience. Positive friendships during younger years often shape how we build relationships later in life. As adults, friendships provide balance and emotional support outside of family, intimate relationships or work responsibilities. Good friends help reduce stress, encourage personal growth, and provide support through life's transitions. For seniors, friendships become especially important. Retirement, health issues, or loss of loved ones can increase the risk of isolation. Maintaining social connections can help improve cognitive function, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life in later years.

Quality friendships are way more important than quantity. With social media, it's possible to have hundreds or even thousands of online "*friends*", but still feel disconnected. True friendship isn't measured by the number of followers or likes we receive. What matters most is the **QUALITY** of our relationships. Healthy friendships take time and are built on trust, respect, honesty, mutual support, shared joy or grief and consistent communication. Even a small circle of close, dependable friends can have a profound positive impact on health and happiness. If you can count the number of true friends on one hand, consider yourself lucky.

Like any meaningful relationship, friendships require time and care. Many adults find it difficult to maintain friendships because of busy schedules, but small efforts can make a big difference. Here are a few ways to nurture friendships:

- **Reach Out Regularly.** A quick text, phone call or lunch invitation helps keep connections strong. Don't wait for "*the perfect time*" to reconnect. Any time can be perfect.
- **Be Present.** Listen fully when spending time with friends. Put away distractions and focus on meaningful conversation.
- **Show Appreciation.** People want to feel valued. Express gratitude for the people who support and encourage you.
- **Make Time for Shared Activities.** Walk together, attend a class, volunteer, or simply enjoy a cup of coffee or a glass of wine together. Shared experiences strengthen bonds.
- **Be Willing to Be Vulnerable.** Authentic friendships deepen when people feel safe sharing struggles, fears, and emotions honestly.

Making friends as an adult can feel intimidating, but it's never too late to form meaningful connections. I find myself in that situation right now since I recently moved to a completely different state where I know almost no one. Here are a few suggestions on how to meet new people and hopefully form new friendships, which I'll actually be doing myself:

- Join clubs or community groups. I've already joined a few local hiking clubs and went on my first group hike, where I met some really nice people.
- Take a fitness class or sign up to learn a new hobby.
- Volunteer with an organization that's important to you.
- Attend local events.
- Reach out and try to meet new neighbors.

Often, people are looking for connection, but end up waiting for someone else to make the first move. Step outside your comfort zone and make the effort. You won't regret it.

Friendships are one of life's greatest gifts. They bring laughter during hard times, comfort during grief, encouragement during challenges, and joy in everyday moments. Beyond emotional happiness, friendships contribute significantly to better mental and physical health. In a culture that often emphasizes productivity and busyness, nurturing relationships may feel secondary. But cultivating friendship is truly one of the most important investments you can make in your life.

In closing I'll say this: Take time to reach out to someone you care about. Send the text. Make the call. Plan the coffee, wine or lunch date. Strong friendships don't just improve life, they help us live healthier, happier, and longer lives. When you can go days, weeks, months or even years without talking to someone, but then when you eventually reconnect, you pick up right where you last left off, you know you've found a true friend.

Have a wonderful month!