



"Find out who you are and do it on purpose.." – Dolly Parton

Toilet Talk

September 2026

The Power of Friendships

Friendships are a universal part of human life — and science shows that they're also good for your health. Having friends can help you feel happier and more satisfied with life. Friends can even help you live longer or age in a healthier way. Research shows that friendships can help lower your risk of certain health problems, including heart disease, dementia and anxiety.

Whether you have a big social circle or just a few close buddies, the friendships that matter tend to be the ones that make you feel useful, supported and cared for — and where you offer those same gifts in return. These are the people who listen when you are upset, check in when they haven't heard from you for a few days, laugh with you over silly things and tell you the truth when you need to hear it. And you do the same for them.

A good friend may not be able to fix your problems. But talking, laughing or simply being with someone who cares can make life feel a little less heavy. People with close friends and trusted confidants are generally more satisfied with their lives and less likely to experience depression, according to studies. Research also shows that supportive friendships can buffer stress: talking with a trusted friend is associated with a lower blood pressure response to stress than talking with someone who isn't in your friendship circle.

"Friendships are like food," says Anna Goldfarb, MA, a friendship expert and author of a book on connections. "There are different kinds of food, and they impart different levels of nutrition. Friendships are the same way." Some friendships are built around doing things together. These may be your walking

buddies, golf partners, book club pals, pickleball mates or people who share a hobby with you. In her book, Goldfarb calls these kinds of friendships "doggy" friendships because — like your wagging friends — they make you want to get out and do something together. Other friendships are built around sharing feelings. These are the people you call — or call you — when a kind ear is needed. They may be the friends you reach out to on a hard day when you don't look or sound your best. Goldfarb defines these intimate friendships as "cat" friendships — the emotionally intimate, curl-up-on-the-couch kind of friends we rely on when we need comfort and honesty.

Both kinds add meaning, routine and connection to your life. Women are more likely to enjoy both types of friendships, while men are more inclined to get their "cat" time from their significant other.

Older friendships matter, too. A friend you knew in high school or from your old neighborhood or previous job may fade from daily life but still hold a special place in your heart.

Friendships change because people do, and that's perfectly fine, Goldfarb says.

You may move, retire, lose a spouse, change jobs or develop new interests. A friendship that was once close may fade. Another may come back to life later.

"You don't have to feel guilty every time a friendship becomes less active," Goldfarb says. In fact, research shows that we usually have no more than a handful of active friendships at any one time.



have to work as hard at friendships because life was simpler 50 years ago. They knew they would see their friends every week at religious services, for example. Today, people move around more, have busier lives, often work remotely and don't see people as much. That means we have to work harder to make friends.

The good news is that it's not hard to connect. Start with extending an invitation that makes it easy for your friend to say yes, Goldfarb says. Instead of firing off an open-ended text saying: "We should get together sometime," try saying: "I am going to be walking at the park Saturday morning. Want to come?"

If you want to make new friends, start with your interests. Are you a gardener? A reader? A music lover? Look for places where people who enjoy the same things gather. "Common interest is what leads friendship," Goldfarb says.

Forming friendships take time, so be patient. A walking friend, classmate or neighbor may not become your closest friend right away.

"Friendship is one of the few relationships between equals," Goldfarb says. "There is no boss, parent or child in charge. Just two people choosing to share part of life. That's why friendships are so delicious and so special."

To learn more , visit www.cdc.gov/social-connectedness.

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