

Wellness Updates

From Healthy Merits

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Social Wellness

What is social wellness?

Social wellness refers to how we interact with the people around us and the effects those relationships have on us. Having good social wellness involves using good communication skills, having meaningful and respectful relationships and creating a reliable support system of friends and family.

Having healthy social wellness can directly benefit your physical and mental wellness as well. You are less at risk of developing anxiety and depression when you have a strong support network. A good social network also provides you the ability to stay physically fit because you've found accountability with a walking or workout partner. Having friends you can talk to and laugh with greatly relieves your stress level. Studies have shown an improvement in blood pressure for those that have a good sense of social well-being.

Improving your social wellness

- 1. Make in-person connections**—go out and join a local class or volunteer, where you can meet new people while contributing in a group setting. Participate in a group class, like yoga, paint nights, cooking classes, book clubs, music/choir rehearsals, etc. and meet new people who share similar interests to yours. Organizations associated with schools, hospitals, community parks, libraries and places of worship are always looking for reliable volunteers to join their efforts.
- 2. Get active together**—join a fitness class, a running club, an amateur league sports team or simply find a walking partner. Being active with others can have a positive effect on your health habits and create opportunities to connect with friends and co-workers.
- 3. Bond with family**—disconnect from technology and spend some time every day interacting with loved ones. Look for opportunities to spend time as a family, be it going for walks, brainstorming solutions for home or school problems or simply cleaning the dinner table together.
- 4. Build healthy relationships**—share your feelings openly and listen to others without judgment or blame. Expect others to treat you with respect and honesty in return. Protect yourself from abusive people and set boundaries with others. It's okay to say no.

- 5. Practice self-care**—make sure you aren't ignoring your own needs when you're being social. If you're tired and really aren't up for meeting friends after work, just be honest. One of the keys of social wellness is improving your own mental wellness, so don't let your time with others become a reason for stress. It's meant to be fun for everyone, especially you.
- 6. Take care of yourself while taking care of others**—at some point in life, most of us end up becoming a caregiver. Whether it's care for children, a parent, a dear friend or even pets, the stress and strain of caregiving can be sudden and overwhelming. If you're feeling stressed as a caregiver, try some self-care strategies in your day. Try to stay social so you can vent about your worries, and don't be afraid to ask for help. Join a caregiver's support group in your community.



Disconnecting through social media

Although social media is a fast and easy way to connect with others, if we spend too much time on social media, we can actually leave ourselves feeling isolated and depressed. Though it's called social media, it doesn't mean that these sites are fulfilling our needs for social interactions.

Recent studies have shown that people who use social media as their main way of interacting with others often suffer from social isolation. Not only did these participants become addicted to their handheld devices, they also had heightened negative thoughts of self-comparison and jealousy. Social media tends to elevate feelings of sadness and loneliness in people with more introverted personalities.

But, when used in moderation, social media can be great for connecting with others. Using social media to invite friends for a night out together or to share fun thoughts and moments from your day are some of the best uses for it. Staying connected with people is what's most important, but remember to prioritize face-to-face interactions when possible.

Activities

Activity #1: The Path to Social Wellness

When you are engaging in the process of attaining social well-being, you value your relationships with others and strive to live in harmony with your community. To see if you are fully engaged in your path to social wellness, take a moment to answer these questions below:

1. Did I make time to spend with my family and friends this week? _____
2. Do I enjoy the time I spend with others? _____
3. Are my relationships with others positive and rewarding? _____
4. Do I explore diversity by interacting with people of other cultures, backgrounds and beliefs? _____

If you answered no to any of those questions, it may be a good indication to spend some extra time on your social well-being. See the next activity below for a few ideas:

Activity #2: List three people in your life that you could consider part of your support group. Write in the blank next to each person how you could strengthen the relationship. It could involve setting aside more time to hang out, becoming a better listener or just being more present.

1. Person A: _____
Next steps: _____
2. Person B: _____
Next steps: _____
3. Person C: _____
Next steps: _____

Healthy Merits corner

Go to www.healthymerits.com, and once you are in, click on the *Library Tab* and browse *Topics*. Then, click on *S* to find a quiz on *social wellness*.

Sources: <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/social-wellness-toolkit>, https://wellness.ucr.edu/social_wellness.html and <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2017/06/30/a-run-down-of-social-medias-effects-on-our-mental-health/#376d22432e5a>.