

Wellbeing Insights



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Connection Counts: How Friendships Support Health, Happiness, and Longevity

Across decades of research, one truth shows up again and again: people with strong social connections tend to live longer, stay healthier, and report greater happiness and life satisfaction. Close relationships are linked to better heart health, stronger immune function, lower stress, and better mental health. They help us recover from hard seasons and savor the good ones more fully.

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Connection Counts: How Friendships Support Health, Happiness, and Longevity

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Yet for many adults, friendship feels harder to come by than it used to. Life fills up. Work expands. Families change. Schedules collide. The easy, built-in connections of earlier years fade, and suddenly friendship can feel like something you're supposed to have already figured out. Add social media to the mix, with lots of interaction but little depth, and it's easy to feel connected without feeling close.

The good news? Friendship in adulthood isn't broken. It just works differently. And once you understand what the research says about connection, you can build relationships that fit your life now.

1. *Social connection is a core pillar of health*

Long-term studies consistently show that close, supportive relationships are one of the strongest predictors of health and well-being across the lifespan. People with meaningful connections tend to manage stress better, experience less chronic illnesses, and report higher overall life satisfaction. One of the most striking findings from decades-long research on adult development is that the quality of our relationships in midlife strongly predicts health and happiness later on.

Connection helps regulate the nervous system, soften stress responses, and provide emotional grounding. Simply put, our bodies respond to being supported.

Try this

- Treat friendship like a health habit, not a nice-to-have.
- Schedule social time the way you schedule workouts or appointments: consistently and without guilt.
- Notice who leaves you feeling calmer, lighter, or more energized after time together. Those relationships matter.

2. *Quality over quantity*

You don't need a huge social circle to benefit from connection. Research shows that relationship quality matters far more than quantity. A few warm, trusting relationships can offer more protection and satisfaction than a long list of casual contacts.

At the same time, relationships marked by constant conflict or emotional strain can take a toll. Supportive friendships help buffer stress; draining ones add to it.

Try this

- Focus on deepening one or two relationships instead of expanding your circle all at once.
- Build simple rituals: a monthly lunch, a weekly walk, a standing check-in text.
- Let go of pressure to be everything to everyone. Strong friendships thrive on mutual ease, not obligation.

3. *Adult friendship takes time, but it's worth it*

Research suggests that building real friendship takes time and repetition, and adult life doesn't always make that easy. Moving from acquaintance to close friend can take dozens of hours spent together, especially in relaxed, social settings. That means friendship grows by showing up again and again.

Try this

- Lower the bar for "meaningful time." A walk, a shared errand, or a casual coffee count.
- Choose recurring activities over one-off plans.
- When you click with someone, make the next plan sooner rather than later.

4. *The "almost-friends" matter more than you think*

Friendship isn't all or nothing. Research on social networks shows that weaker ties, like neighbors, fellow regulars, group members, and acquaintances, play an important role in well-being. These connections bring novelty, perspective, and a sense of belonging, and they often serve as bridges to deeper relationships over time.

Feeling socially connected doesn't require intimacy with everyone. Just feeling like you are 'part of something' is impactful too.

Try this

- Become a regular somewhere: a class, a park, a coffee shop, a volunteer group.
- Practice low-pressure connection like learning names and exchanging smiles and brief conversations.
- Let shared activities do the heavy lifting instead of forcing deep conversation right away.

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5. Closeness grows through real conversation and shared joy

Research shows that gradual, mutual self-disclosure strengthens closeness. Just as important: how we respond to someone's good news matters deeply. Being curious, enthusiastic, and genuinely supportive when someone shares a win helps build trust and emotional safety.

Try this

- Ask questions that invite more than a yes-or-no answer.
- Share honestly, without oversharing.
- When someone shares something positive, take a moment to acknowledge and celebrate with them.

6. Intentional friendship is adult friendship

One of the biggest shifts in adulthood is that friendship becomes less spontaneous and more intentional. Scheduling ahead, reopening old connections, and creating regular points of contact are often what keep relationships alive.

Try this

- Reach out to one dormant friend this week with a simple message.
- Use your current circle as connectors: many adult friendships begin through mutual friends.
- Start something if it doesn't exist yet: a walking group, book swap, monthly dinner, or shared hobby.

Friendship in adulthood may look different than it once did, but it can be just as rich, sometimes even more so. With intention, consistency, and a little courage, connection becomes less about finding the perfect people and more about showing up for the ones already within reach.



Summer Melon

What better time to enjoy nature's abundance of fresh, juicy melons than summer? A delicious and refreshing treat, melon can cool you down in the hot months ahead. From watermelons to honeydews, a variety of melons exist, each with their own unique flavor and texture. Whether you prefer using melons in sweet smoothies or savory salads, there's a melon out there that's sure to please.

Watermelon

Watermelon is one of the most ubiquitous summer melons. It has a thick, green rind and juicy, red flesh. Watermelon is a good source of vitamins A and C and lycopene, an antioxidant that's been linked with a reduced risk of cancer. Due to its high-water content, it's also a great source of hydration. Watermelons can be enjoyed in many ways: cut into wedges to enjoy on their own; cubed and added to salads or smoothies; or frozen and blended into a delicious sorbet. As melons pair well with heat, sprinkling Tajin or chili-lime seasoning on watermelon wedges is a great way to enjoy a sweet, salty, spicy snack. If you love watermelon, give these comparable varieties a try:

- **Sugar Baby:** Small, dark green, aptly named watermelons with intensely sweet watermelon flavor and texture
- **Yellow Watermelon:** A slightly more mellow twist on your traditional red watermelon

Honeydew

Honeydew is another popular summer melon with a very mild flavor that's less sweet than many of its relatives. It has a smooth, green rind and creamy, white flesh and is a good source of vitamins A and C and potassium. Honeydew is often served in fruit salads or enjoyed on its own. Often thought of as breakfast fruit and sometimes paired with cottage cheese, it can also be used to make a variety of sweet treats, such as pies, cakes, and sorbets. If you love honeydew, give these varieties a try:

- **Galia:** With an exterior that resembles a cantaloupe, flesh that resembles honeydew and a flavor that's the perfect blend of both
- **Casaba:** With a bright yellow rind and yellow-white flesh, this melon is very mild, and its flavor may remind you of a cucumber

Cantaloupe

Cantaloupe has a textured, netted rind and sweet, orange flesh. Like honeydew, it's a good source of vitamins A and C and potassium. Cantaloupe has a sweet, juicy flavor that's perfect for salads and smoothies but can also be used to make a variety of dishes, such as chilled soups, salads, and tarts. If you love cantaloupe, give these varieties a try:

- **Canary:** With a bright yellow rind and soft yellow flesh, its flavor is similar to cantaloupe, with notes of pineapple and pear
- **Hami:** This elongated muskmelon tastes like a cantaloupe but has a slightly sweeter, crisper flesh

Melons can typically be prepared similarly, and the possibilities are endless:

- Slice and eat it plain for an easy on-the-go snack.
- Add melon to a fruit salad for sweetness and texture.
- Blend melon into a smoothie for a vitamin-rich beverage.
- Top melon with yogurt, cottage cheese, or thinly sliced prosciutto for additional protein.
- Blend melon into a sweet or savory soup for an unexpected first-course twist.
- Grill your melon to bring out its natural sweetness.

No matter what your taste, there's a melon and a way to prepare it that's sure to please. Expand your melon horizons this summer and enjoy!

Keep It Fresh

- When choosing a melon, look for one that's heavy for its size; this indicates that it's ripe and full of juice.
- The rind should be smooth and free of blemishes.
- The stem should be green and fresh-looking.
- Netted varieties (textured rind varieties) will give off an aroma. Take a sniff: If it smells sweet, it's ready to eat.
- If you're not going to eat the melon right away, store it in a cool, dry place.

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On the Menu: Summer Melon

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Watermelon Feta Salad

Melon has a natural affinity with cheese. The saltiness of feta pairs well with the coolness of watermelon in this delicious, light salad.

Ingredients

- 1 small or 1/4 large seedless watermelon, rind removed and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 qt. arugula leaves
- 4 oz. feta cheese, crumbled
- 1/4 c. fresh mint leaves, roughly chopped
- 3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- Zest of 1/2 lemon
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions

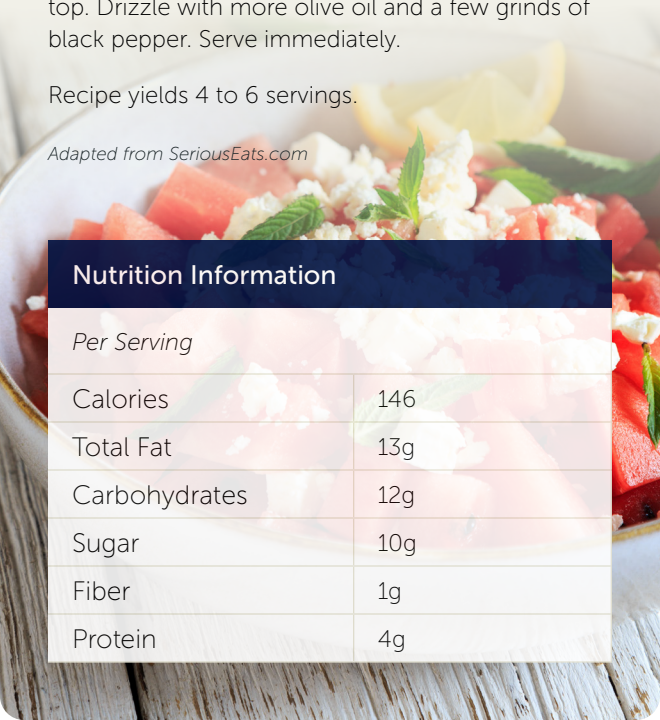
Place watermelon chunks in a large bowl. Add lemon juice and zest to the bowl with watermelon. Add mint, oil, and arugula, and toss until watermelon is evenly dressed. Season lightly to taste with salt and pepper.

Transfer salad to a wide, shallow bowl or a large plate and spread out evenly. Crumble feta over the top. Drizzle with more olive oil and a few grinds of black pepper. Serve immediately.

Recipe yields 4 to 6 servings.

Adapted from [SeriousEats.com](#)

Nutrition Information	
Per Serving	
Calories	146
Total Fat	13g
Carbohydrates	12g
Sugar	10g
Fiber	1g
Protein	4g



Sweet & Spicy Grilled Melon

Ingredients

- 1 ripe melon of your choice (cantaloupe works well), cut into spears with rinds removed
- 2 tsp. honey
- 1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. Tajin or other brand of chili-lime seasoning
- Flaky sea salt

Directions

Heat grill or grill pan to high heat.

Brush the cantaloupe slices with olive oil and sprinkle the Tajin on top.

Place the cantaloupe on the grill and cook for 3 to 4 minutes on each side or until dark grill marks appear. After both sides have been grilled, remove and let rest for 3 minutes.

Drizzle the honey across the cantaloupe and top with a sprinkle of sea salt.

Recipe yields 4 servings.

Adapted from [ThisHealthyTable.com](#)

Nutrition Information	
Per Serving	
Calories	71
Total Fat	1g
Carbohydrates	15g
Sugar	14g
Fiber	2g
Protein	1g



Lifting and Stretching:

How to Avoid Strains and Stay Pain-Free

Most of us don't think twice about lifting a box, reaching for something on a high shelf, or twisting to grab an item nearby. But these everyday movements are some of the most common causes of muscle strains and aches. The good news? A few small adjustments can go a long way in keeping your body feeling strong and pain-free.

Taking a moment to move with intention, especially when lifting, reaching, or bending, can help prevent injury and keep you feeling your best throughout the day.

Why Strains Happen

Strains and other musculoskeletal issues don't usually come from a single big moment. They often build up over time. These injuries can affect muscles, joints, tendons, and even nerves, showing up as stiffness, soreness, or discomfort during certain movements.

You might notice:

- A dull ache or tightness
- Tenderness or stiffness
- Tingling or cramping
- Discomfort that fades with rest but returns with activity

The most commonly affected areas? The neck, lower back, shoulders, and wrists, especially for those doing repetitive tasks or lifting throughout the day.

The Everyday Risk Factors to Watch For

Most strains can be traced back to a few common movement patterns. Becoming more aware of these is the first step in preventing injury:

- **Awkward postures:** bending, twisting, or reaching in ways that put strain on your body
- **Using too much force:** lifting or pushing more than your body is ready for
- **Repetitive motion:** doing the same movement over and over without a break
- **Contact stress:** pressure on certain parts of the body, such as wrists or elbows

These risks often show up together. For example, lifting something heavy while twisting your body or reaching too far increases strain significantly.



Start with Flexibility

One of the simplest ways to prevent injury is also one of the most overlooked: preparing your body to move.

When muscles are tight or "cold," they're more likely to strain. Taking just a few minutes to stretch can make a noticeable difference in how your body handles movement throughout the day.

Try incorporating simple, gentle stretches:

- **Hands and wrists:** Flex and extend your wrists to get them ready for gripping and lifting
- **Neck:** Slowly tilt side to side and front to back
- **Back:** While seated, gently bend forward, bringing your chest toward your knees

Lift Smarter, Not Harder

How you lift matters more than how strong you are. Using proper technique reduces strain on your body and helps you stay injury-free over time.

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Lifting and Stretching: How to Avoid Strains and Stay Pain-Free

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Before You Lift

Pause and take a quick look at the object:

- Is it too heavy or awkward to lift alone?
- Can it be broken into smaller parts?
- Do you have a clear path to where you're going?

If something feels off, trust that instinct and ask for help or adjust your approach.

While You Lift

Focus on controlled, steady movement:

- **Use your legs, not your back.** Bend your knees and keep your back as straight as possible.
- **Keep the load close.** Holding items close to your body reduces strain.
- **Lift smoothly.** Avoid jerky or rushed movements.

Your leg muscles are designed for lifting power. Your back is not.

Avoid These Common Mistakes

- Twisting your torso while lifting
- Bending at the waist instead of the knees
- Trying to carry too much at once

Instead, lift first, then turn your whole body using your feet.

Be Mindful of Reaching and Twisting

Reaching, bending, and twisting can put just as much stress on your body as lifting a heavy load.

- **Reaching overhead** can arch your back and strain your shoulders
- **Reaching too far forward** puts pressure on your lower back
- **Twisting or side bending** increases the risk of muscle strain, especially when carrying weight

A simple rule of thumb: keep things within a comfortable range and reposition your body instead of stretching beyond it.

Quick Rules for Safer Movement

When in doubt, come back to these basics:

- Test the weight before lifting
- Bend your knees and use your legs
- Keep your body aligned and balanced
- Lift in a smooth, steady motion
- Avoid twisting; turn your whole body instead
- Make sure your path is clear
- Set items down carefully
- Push carts instead of pulling them
- Ask for help with large or awkward loads

These small habits add up and can make a big difference over time.

By paying attention to how you lift, stretch, and position your body, you can reduce discomfort, improve mobility, and stay more energized throughout your day.

The next time you're about to lift, reach, or twist, take that extra second to check in with your body. It's a small pause that can help you avoid a bigger problem later on.

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