

Social connectedness and health

Social connectedness has a significant influence on our minds, bodies and behaviours. Being socially connected can lead to longer life, better health and improved wellbeing.

On the other hand, social isolation and loneliness can pose a significant risk to a person's mental and physical health. People who are socially connected have a 50% increased likelihood of maintaining a fulfilled long life compared to those who have fewer social connections. There are broader benefits as well; it can also help create trust and resilience within communities.

Positive outcomes are linked to a sense of belonging, supportive and inclusive connection in various settings, such as neighbourhoods, schools, places of worship, workplaces and more. There are numerous ways to improve social connection:



Establish and maintain social connections

Dedicate time and attention to develop and maintain relationships. Become a part of a social or sporting group within your community to connect with others - groups with shared interests, values and goals can be rewarding and foster a sense of belonging.



Consider the support you give, receive, and have available to you

Reach out to sources of support to help you through tough times, even though it can be hard to ask for help sometimes. Members of your family, friends, community and health care providers can be sources of support.



Strengthen the quality of social connections

Focus on building high-quality and meaningful connections. Find ways to be responsive, supportive and grateful to others within your circle. It's always important to take steps to address conflict or negative feelings as they arise.



Address barriers to social connection

Take care of your physical health. Staying healthy allows you to connect with others socially and enjoy those connections. Don't let technology distract you from engaging with people!



Become more active

There's strong correlation between exercise and good health! At every age and stage, exercise offers both immediate and long-term benefits. Becoming a part of a group fitness gym or social activity group can increase social connectivity and your mobility.





Social isolation and loneliness

Social isolation is the lack of relationships with others and little to no social support or contact. It is associated with risk even if people don't feel lonely.

Loneliness is feeling alone or disconnected from others. It is feeling like you don't have any meaningful or close relationships or a sense of belonging. It is the difference between a person's actual and desired level of connection.

Risk factors for social isolation and loneliness include:

- Having a mental health illness or depressive disorder
 - Being marginalised or discriminated against
 - Challenges to accessing resources – living in rural areas, transport and language barriers.
 - Having a chronic disease/condition or long-term disability
 - Being a victim of abuse or violence
 - Being unmarried, unpartnered or living alone
- Major life changes such as getting divorced, losing a job or loss of a loved one.

How can social connections with others help?

Social connections can:

- Improve your ability to recover from stress, anxiety and depression.
- Promote healthy eating, physical activity and maintain a healthy weight.
- Improve sleep, well-being and quality of life.
- Reduce your risk of violent and suicidal behaviours.
- Prevent death from chronic diseases.
- Helps communities thrive promoting health, safety and resilience.
- May encourage people to give back to their communities which further strengthens those connections.

Berry swirl yoghurt bark

This colourful snack is perfect to share with colleagues at your next team huddle or morning tea!

Serves 6, prep time 5 min

Ingredients list

- ▶ 2 cups (560g) of Greek style yoghurt
- ▶ 1/4 cup (80g) of raspberry jam
- ▶ 5 strawberries, thinly sliced
- ▶ 125g raspberries
- ▶ 1/2 cup (75g) blueberries

Method

- ▶ Line a large baking tray with baking paper.
- ▶ Spoon the yoghurt evenly over the lined tray and smooth the surface.
- ▶ Top with dollops of raspberry jam and use the back of a spoon to marble.
- ▶ Sprinkle the strawberries, raspberries and blueberries evenly.
- ▶ Place in the freezer for 3 hours or until firm.
- ▶ When ready to eat, transfer the yoghurt to a clean work surface and cut into pieces.
- ▶ Serve immediately or store in an airtight container in the freezer for up to 1 week!



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