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## How Does Social Connectedness Affect Health?

Social connectedness influences our minds, bodies, and behaviors—all of which influence our health and life expectancy. Research shows that social connectedness can lead to longer life, better health, and improved well-being.

**Social connectedness** is the degree to which people have and perceive a desired number, quality, and diversity of relationships that create a sense of belonging, and being cared for, valued, and supported.

People are by nature social creatures. Social connections are important for our survival.<sup>7</sup> Our relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and community members can have a major impact on our health and well-being.

When people are socially connected and have stable and supportive relationships, they are more likely to make healthy choices and to have better mental and physical health outcomes. They are also better able to cope with hard times, stress, anxiety, and depression.

There are many things that create social connectedness. The amount and quality of our relationships matter, as do the various roles they play in our lives.

### **Community Health**

There are other benefits of social connectedness beyond individual health. Social connectedness can also help create trust and resilience within communities.

A sense of community belonging and supportive and inclusive connections in our neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, workplaces, and other settings are associated with a variety of positive outcomes.<sup>19</sup> Having supportive and inclusive relationships:

- Helps communities thrive and support the overall well-being, health, safety, and resilience of communities.

- May encourage people to give back to their communities, which may further strengthen those connections.

## **Characteristics of Social Connectedness**

- The number, variety, and types of relationships a person has.
- Having meaningful and regular social exchanges.
- Sense of support from friends, families, and others in the community.
- Sense of belonging.
- Having close bonds with others.
- Feeling loved, cared for, valued, and appreciated by others.
- Having more than 1 person to turn to for support. This includes emotional support when feeling down, and physical support, like getting a ride to the doctor or grocery store, or getting help with childcare on short notice.
- Access to safe public areas to gather (such as parks and recreation centers).

## **Health Benefits of Social Connectedness**

People with stronger social bonds have a 50% increased likelihood of survival than those who have fewer social connections.

### **Social connection can help prevent serious illness and outcomes, like:**

- Heart disease.
- Stroke.
- Dementia.
- Depression and anxiety.

### **Social connection with others can help:**

- Improve your ability to recover from stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Promote healthy eating, physical activity, and weight.
- Improve sleep, well-being, and quality of life.
- Reduce your risk of violent and suicidal behaviors.
- Prevent death from chronic diseases.

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