

Words of Wellness



February 2021

The Value of Social Connection

Social Wellness involves relationships with friends, family, pets, and the larger community, and having an interest in and concern for the needs of others. There is strong evidence showing the value of social relationships on health and well-being and many of the other wellness dimensions. The pandemic has drawn our attention to social wellness for young and old. Disconnection and loneliness became so rampant for so many. We have been inspired however; how creative people have become reaching out to others. One thing we have learned is how important social connections can be so important for our health. This is true for heart **health**.

During February, the entire month and a few special days offer us the chance to reflect on the value of connections and social wellness. During February we recognize *American Heart Month* and special days including *Promise Day*, and *Valentine Day*.

American Heart Month focuses **on heart health**, what is in our control to reduce risk factors for developing **cardiovascular** disease.

- Find a time to talk. By zoom phone, text, or at home in person, have a **heart-to-heart** talk with people you care about.
- Get active. Set aside time each day to move your body, even just for a ten-minute walk outside or around the house. Walking is one of the best things you can do.
- Check your blood pressure and cholesterol levels regularly.

February 11, Promise Day signifies the importance of commitment. On this day, you make a promise of going steady, or being together and hold on to that promise forever.

Make the people you care about feel **special** on this day through thoughtful gifts and gift cards, specially selected with your promise in mind.

February 14, Valentine's Day can be shared with friends and family relations and pets. It is an all-inclusive culture when celebrating Valentine's Day. Pets are a strong social connection for many; so many are gifting dog-friendly treats and themed gifts.

Think about sending cards and messages to spread your compassion to all you know. This year, Valentine 's Day falls on Sunday, so prepare yourself a nice breakfast or plan to watch your favorite movies. Embrace your creative side and work on any creative projects or just plan to send a nice handwritten card to people you care about.

Consider

- Do you have a network of friends, family and supporters?
- How well you are able to balance your needs with the needs of others?
- Are you compassionate and try to help others when possible?
- How well do you give and receive compliments graciously?
- Are you able to communicate with and get along with a wide variety of people?
- Are you interested in others, including those with backgrounds that are different from own?

Using Social Media to Connect

by Corey Kuebler, BA, CRSP

Popular social media websites like Facebook and Instagram provide a great way to connect with friends and family. However, these internet platforms also have inherent risks for people with mental health and substance use challenges. Many people find that social media makes them feel less lonely, which may explain why the coronavirus pandemic has increased the time that people are spending on social media, which makes awareness of these risks more important.

The sense of community that social media websites provide comes at a cost. For example, someone living with an anxiety disorder is more likely to compare themselves to others on social media who they see as “better than I am.”

It may seem surprising to discover that high levels of social media use are related to feelings of social isolation. Although this was found before the pandemic, recent stressors may add to the sense of isolation. Fear and worry about COVID-19 increases the risk for mental health symptoms.

One way to reduce the risk is to limit our social media use, which can reduce feelings of loneliness and depression in as little as three weeks! Even keeping track of your social media use and being mindful about how and when you connect online can help you make decisions about how you spend your time.

Apps can track how much time we spend on certain apps and social media sites. We can set time limits to stop us from scrolling or browsing longer than we want to. Examples are Stay Free (for Android phones) and Moment (for iPhones).

It’s worth exploring alternatives to connecting through social media. For example, try setting up a group video call to connect with friends and family. Many video call apps permit group video

calls. Do check in advance to see if you might have data charges if you use a computer or phone that is not connected to the internet or WiFi.

Here are some video call apps you can explore:

- **Google Duo** is a free video call service for group video calls with no time limit.
- **Google Meets** is a free video call service for group video calls. These calls can go beyond one hour only until March 2021.”
- **Skype:** Skype-to-Skype video calls are free, which means everyone in your group needs to have a Skype account. Group video calls are limited to 100 hours/month, 10 hours/day or 4 hours per individual video call.
- **Zoom** limits group video calls to 40 minutes for the free Basic plan. Upgrading to a paid plan lets you make longer calls.

These apps and programs can help you connect to your friends and family. If you have a smartphone, you may be able to make three-way calls or send group texts to connect with a group. It may be most helpful to schedule video calls in advance to be sure that others are available.

Make the most of your social wellness in this socially distanced pandemic by being mindful of the benefits and risks of social media, monitoring and limiting your social media use, and accessing free tools to connect with our loved ones through group video calls.

As resilient as we may be individually, we need one another to make it through these challenging times. These strategies can help us stay connected, fulfilled, and safe while we cope with COVID-19.

References and Resources

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you

When we take care of **#OurHearts** as part of our self-care, we reduce our risk of heart disease.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
THE HEART TRUTH

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