

April 2024

# Benefits News

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## Why social connections are important

Humans are social creatures. Connecting with others is important for our wellbeing. Making and maintaining good relationships with others can improve our health and help us live longer, happier lives. Learn what experts are saying about these topics, along with how the Board works with our vendor partners.

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## How social connections improve your health

Relationships with family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and others can have a major impact on your health and wellbeing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), when you're more socially connected, you're more likely to make healthy choices and have better mental and physical health.



The CDC says that people with stronger bonds typically live longer than those who don't have many social connections. Studies show that social connectedness has these health benefits:



**Prevents serious illnesses and conditions, such as:**

- Heart disease
- Depression
- Dementia
- Anxiety
- Stroke



**Improves your ability to fight off and recover from illnesses, stress, anxiety, and depression.**



**Promotes healthier eating and exercise habits.**



**Improves your sleep, wellbeing, and quality of life.**



**Reduces your risk of hurting yourself or others.**



**Decreases your risk of death from chronic diseases.<sup>1</sup>**



**Social connections can reduce your stress levels.**

When you interact with people who support you, your body releases oxytocin. This hormone helps reduce your stress.

## Are you socially connected?

The CDC's studies show that feeling socially connected means you have relationships in your life that give you a sense of belonging. You can rely on someone to share the good and bad times. Those relationships help you feel secure, loved, accepted, and valued. People who are socially connected often:



**Have a number and variety of relationships with family members, friends, coworkers, and community members.**

**Have regular and meaningful interactions with others.**

**Feel a sense of support and belonging.**

**Feel loved, appreciated, and cared for by others.**

**Have more than one person they can turn to for help or support.**

**Have safe nearby areas to meet, such as parks, walking trails, recreation centers, etc.<sup>1, 2</sup>**

Staying connected with others is important. If you don't have many people you can turn to right now, help is here! Keep reading to find ways to build new connections.

## ERGs, ensure your voice is heard!

Last year we launched a series of listening sessions with our Employee Resource Groups. The listening sessions aim to create a safe and inclusive space for you to share your thoughts, concerns, and recommendations regarding our wellness programs.

Ensure your voice is heard and your needs considered as we work to improve the equity of our programs. If your ERG is interested in hosting a listening session, please reach out to **Charna Freehan** by May 15.



# How to make friends as an adult



Think back to when you were in school. Making friends was easier, right? You and your classmates or teammates had things in common because of your science teacher or the sport you played together. But as we get older, it's not as easy to find people with similar interests.

Creating and maintaining a friendship as an adult takes time and effort. You have to make a point of it. In our busy lives, it's easy to put it off. And leaving it up to chance rarely pans out.

According to **Healthline**, here are some ways you can be proactive about creating a new connection:

## Have the right mindset to make friends



- ✓ **Be open to the idea.** Try to welcome the idea of making a new friend rather than worrying about rejection.
- ✓ **Put down your phone.** Notice what's around you. People are more likely to engage with you if you're looking up.
- ✓ **Create a list of potential friends.** Who in your life might you like to know better? Who might be fun to grab coffee or go for a walk with?
- ✓ **Schedule something on the calendar.** Be intentional about when and where you'll meet. It's much more likely to happen when you select a date and time.
- ✓ **Say yes to invitations.** If somebody invites you to do something, say yes if you can. This is a great way to open the door to a new friendship opportunity.
- ✓ **Try something new.** Join a bowling league, try pickleball, or take an art class. It's a great way to meet new people. You'll immediately have something in common.

## Seek out new friends



- ✔ **Leverage your social media accounts.** Get to know your friends better. Check out their feeds to find common interests, and then start a conversation about it. Or host an event, like a game night, and advertise it on your social media account to see who might be interested.
- ✔ **Connect with your neighbors.** New friends might be as close as across the street. The next time you're both outside, strike up a conversation instead of just waving hello.
- ✔ **Reach out to your coworkers.** Thank them for helping you on a project. Send them a note to see how they're doing. Invite them to join you for coffee or lunch.
- ✔ **Get active.** Join a gym or hiking club. Strike up a conversation with the person next to you in spin class. Grab a lemonade or a meal with your golfing partners after the 18th hole.
- ✔ **Attend a meetup or networking event.** These activities are filled with people who are looking to make connections with others. It's a great place to find others who share your same passions. Use apps like Meetup and Eventbrite to find gatherings near you.
- ✔ **Join a club.** Is reading your thing? Try a book club. Is cooking or hiking more up your alley? There are clubs for those activities too. Use the Meetup app to find clubs in your area.
- ✔ **Volunteer in your community.** Visit nursing homes, help at the youth center, or read books to children at the library. Many communities offer a volunteer resource center where you can find opportunities that are a good fit for you.

## Maintain your new friendships



- ✓ **Stay in contact.** Once you establish new connections, call, email, or text them regularly to see how they're doing. Show an interest in their families, activities, and more.
- ✓ **Do mundane things together.** Make running errands more fun by doing them with a friend. Grocery shopping, picking up dry cleaning, and walking to the mailbox are more enjoyable when you have company.
- ✓ **Schedule your next get-together.** Time has a way of slipping by quickly. Pick a date and time to get together again to keep the budding friendship going.<sup>2, 3</sup>

## Make a friend through an act of kindness

An act of kindness is a good deed you can do to show another person you care. When you do an act of kindness for someone, it boosts the receiver's mood as well as your own. According to Moda Health, the process of doing something nice for another person releases "feel good" chemicals in your body that make you feel happy. It also increases your sense of connection with the recipient and makes you feel valued.

Here are some free or low-cost ideas to provide acts of kindness:

- Write a thoughtful note to a friend or family member.
- Help a neighbor by mowing their lawn or offering to babysit.
- Volunteer at your favorite charity.
- Leave a positive review for a small business you visited recently.
- Give a compliment.<sup>11</sup>



# Men need friends too: Six friend-making tips that work



Making friends as an adult can be difficult. This is especially true for men. According to **Verywell Mind**, studies show that only 15% of men say they have any close friends. Friendships are vital to our mental wellbeing.

According to **Fatherly**, are some practical tips for creating new friendships, especially for men:

1

**Get out of the house.** It feels comfortable to binge-watch a TV series at home, but you don't meet new people that way. You'll be amazed how many people you can meet when you wash the car in your driveway!

2

**Be willing to open up.** Be direct and honest with new people. Studies show that being open makes others like you more.

3

**Reconnect with your old friends.** Reach out to pals with whom you've lost touch. It can be difficult to relearn about each other, but once you find interests you share, conversation becomes easier.

4

**Spot people who share your interests.** Talk to the person next to you at the driving range. Chat with neighbors who are also doing yardwork. Start up a friendly conversation with other dog walkers you meet along the way.

5

**Plan a regular activity.** Invite friends over for a monthly game night or to watch sports. Schedule weekend getaways. You'll find this is a great way to develop or rekindle old friendships.

6

**Be curious about others.** Go beyond the usual questions. Ask what a person likes about their hometown or job. Digging a little deeper shows that you're interested. Everyone has a story to tell, and you might learn you have things in common.<sup>4, 5, 6, 7</sup>

# Connect with friends who live far away



According to Dr. Amy Janan Johnson, a communication professor at the University of Oklahoma, meeting friends in person is ideal, connecting with others online can also have health advantages. Here are some ways NPR suggests to keep the long-distance friendship going:



**Have a conversation.** If your friend lives across the country, phone or video calls can help connect you and lower your stress levels.



**Develop “anchors” for your friendship.** An anchor is something you have in common that gives you a good excuse to reach out to each other. Perhaps, because you each like them, you can be intentional about sharing funny pet videos or daily dad jokes. If you both like trying new recipes, swap photos for ones you have tried and enjoyed.



**Use your social media accounts to engage with your friends.** Instead of mindlessly scrolling, like or respond to one of your friend’s posts. It’s an easy way to feel part of their community.



**If you can, visit your friend and vice versa.** It’s a great way to keep your friendship going and create even more common bonds.<sup>8,9</sup>





## Signs you're in a healthy relationship

- ✓ **Mutual respect**—You value each other's beliefs. You respect each other's work and dreams. You stick up for each other and don't overstep boundaries.
- ✓ **Safety**—You don't feel threatened, afraid, or the need to protect yourself.
- ✓ **Open and honest communication**—You can share your thoughts and feelings without fear. You feel heard.
- ✓ **Compromise**—You take each other's feelings into consideration. You both give a little.
- ✓ **Fairness**—There's an equal amount of give and take. You respect each other's feelings and input.
- ✓ **Independence**—You support each other having separate hobbies and time away to see other friends.
- ✓ **Support**—You listen and provide compassion and feedback to one another.
- ✓ **Privacy**—You respect each other's need for your own space.<sup>10</sup>

### Need help building a strong relationship?

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help. Confidential counseling, coaching, and online learning centers are available 24/7.

Get started here:

- **For PEBB members (except OSU):**

- Visit the [Canopy EAP website](#)
- Call 800-433-2320 or text 503-850-7721

- **For OSU employees:**

- Visit [Lyra Health EAP website](#)
- Call 877-235-7812

# PEBB at your service

## Building connection with our vendor partners

The PEBB Board and our vendor partners work together to ensure our members are well served. We use several ways to measure how well they're doing, including:



**Metrics.** PEBB has a contract with each vendor partner. The Board and the vendor partner regularly review the agreed upon metrics.



**Customer service quality.** The vendor partners ask members to complete surveys. Also, calls are recorded and monitored to ensure representatives are providing accurate information and quality service. These results are shared with the Board.



**Reporting accuracy.** Vendor partners must provide documentation to back up the accuracy of their reporting.



**Speed and accuracy of claims processing.** Vendor partners must pay claims in line with the plan rules.



**Ease of working relationship.** PEBB staff regularly interact with the vendor partners and note how easy they are to work with.



**Member feedback.** The Board reviews how members feel about each vendor partners' strengths and areas for improvement.

The Board and staff collaborate with the vendor partners to make improvements if issues come up. This is how the Board ensures our members get the best service for their benefit dollars.

PEBB Board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month and are open to the public. To learn more about upcoming meetings or to view recordings of past meetings, visit the [Public Meetings](#) page of the PEBB website.

### Benefits Questions?

Email: [pebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:pebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov)

Phone: 503-373-1102



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## How social connections improve your health

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## Connecting with friends who live far away

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