

There are many benefits of having positive relationships and social support. These include better mental health and better heart health. Having a variety of different types of relationships is beneficial, including close friends, acquaintances, and mentors.

Health benefits of having social support:

- Social support is good for your heart. It is associated with a reduced risk of heart disease and stroke, better control of high blood pressure, and lower inflammation in the body.
- Close relationships are good for your mental health. People with social support have a lower risk of depression and may have better response to stress.
- Relationships are especially important to have as we age. Having social support may lower the risk of dementia.
- Animals can also be an excellent form of support. Studies have shown that having a pet may decrease blood pressure and heart rate. One study showed that walking a dog improved feelings of loneliness. Another study showed that petting an animal for ten minutes lowered the stress hormone cortisol.

Tips to increase your support network:

- Cultivate a variety of relationship types, which could include both local and long-distance friends. For example, perhaps there is someone in your local area who supports the same sports team, while a long-distance friend shares a common interest or hobby with you. Each person can provide a different aspect of support in your life.
- Schedule virtual or phone dates with long-distance friends, or walks with local friends.
- Volunteer at a charity, food bank, or animal shelter.
- Join a book club or [meetup group](#). Many areas have a wide variety of interest groups, including activity groups like outdoor or mall walking. There are also many online group options, such as those learning a new language.
- Take a class for something in which you'd like to learn more. Cooking classes are a great way to interact with new people and learn new skills.
- Take care of a pet, such as walking your dog or petting your cat.



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