

What's your happy? Explore, create, connect...

September 2016 Newsletter



**Building your
connection with the
"now"**

**Creating connection
through touch**

**Making and keeping
friends**

**e-Thoughts —
Reconnecting with
old friends**



Being mindful can make a
difference in your life.

More...

A simple touch can show so
much.

More...

Friendships take work... but
they're worth it.

More...

It's easier than ever to find
and renew old friendships.

More...

Getting help

Confidential support, information and resource referrals are available for a variety of concerns — both work and personal. Call for assistance for you, your household members or your adult children under age 26, whether they live at home or not. Call or visit us online today!

Building your connection with the “now”

September 2016 Newsletter



[Return to index page](#)

Here’s a short experiment: For the next minute or two, try to focus only on reading this article. See if you can be right here, right now.

If your mind wanders off, it’s okay. Just notice what’s drawn your attention away and gently bring it back to reading this article.

Enjoy the present through mindfulness

This experiment is about mindfulness. Mindfulness is “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally.”¹

“Mono-tasking” instead of “multi-tasking” is one way that we practice mindfulness. While trying to read this article, you can get distracted by thoughts about last night’s TV shows, your next meeting or what you’re making for dinner. Part of being mindful is noticing your mind is elsewhere and coming back to doing just this one thing right now.

Benefits of mindfulness

Mindfulness can help you enjoy life more. When you pay attention to what you’re doing and how you’re doing it, you can feel calmer and more in charge.

People who practice mindfulness have been shown to have²:

- Better ability to manage pain and fight off illness
- Less obsessive thinking
- Sharper focus
- Better decision-making skills
- Less overall stress

Ways to practice mindfulness

- **When in a meeting, stay focused on it.** When your mind wanders, just bring it back to your breathing and to what’s happening within you and around you. The benefits? You can improve your communication, problem-solving skills and creativity because you’re really present.
- **Try eating alone once a week or more.** Have you ever “inhaled” a meal and then had trouble even remembering what you ate? Try this: While eating, think about the taste, smell and look of your food. It may take less to satisfy you — and you may get more pleasure from the meal.
- **Spend time with someone and think only about what the two of you are doing and saying.** Being with someone — and not taking phone calls or checking messages — can help you enjoy each other more. It gives you space to bond.

It’s easy to get started with mindfulness

With regular practice, you can build your ability to be “here” right now. Start by trying to be mindful for just three breaths. Do it for one, five, or ten minutes a day. Then aim for a few more times a day.

As you make it more of a habit, you’ll find mindfulness can create a positive difference in your life. Try it and see!

¹www.mindful.org. Accessed July 2016.

²www.psychologytoday.com. Accessed July 2016.

Creating connection through touch

September 2016 Newsletter



[Return to index page](#)

Did you know that, as humans, we crave touch from the moment we're born?¹ Holding a baby helps him or her feel safe and comforted.

When they're cradled and cuddled, infants sense they're valued. Touch is one of the most basic building blocks of self-esteem.

More benefits of touch

Adults, too, benefit from touch. Even a light pat on the arm or shoulder can show support, sympathy and caring.

Adults who are suddenly alone after a loss can miss the contact with their partners or spouses. They may feel "skin hunger" from the lack of casual and intimate touch they once shared with their "touch partner."²

Pets also provide touch benefits. In addition to companionship and fun, pets offer sensory pleasure. Just holding, stroking or petting a companion animal can help lower stress and blood pressure.³ And it feels good!

The value of a hug

Research shows that hugging sparks the release of oxytocin in our bodies. This chemical boosts trust and lowers fear.⁴

Hugs may also help keep your heart healthy. A study looked at the heart rate and blood pressure of two groups — huggers and non-huggers. The huggers had lower blood pressure and resting heart rates than non-huggers.⁴

Massage: the healing touch

Massage — a form of touch in which an expert applies varying pressure to different parts of your body — can be a complement to Western medicine. Massage can help reduce and manage stress.³

It can also help with:

- Anxiety
- Stomach problems
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Muscle aches
- Fibromyalgia³

There are different types of massage for different needs. For example, there are sports, deep tissue and trigger point massages.

Each offers a way to help you relax, re-energize and heal. And, like other forms of touch, massage can make you feel calm and happy.

Remember, hugs and massages are just two types of touch. Touch can be a handshake, "high five," pat on the back or other contact. In all its forms, a caring touch can help create a sense of well-being and connection.

¹www.dailystrength.org

²www.psychologytoday.com

³www.helpguide.org

⁴www.mayoclinic.com

Making and keeping friends

September 2016 Newsletter



[Return to index page](#)

Psychologist Robin Dunbar has done extensive research about human relationships. He's proposed concepts called the "Dunbar numbers."¹

One of the Dunbar numbers says that the average person has five close friends.¹ They're the people you can call anytime, tell anything and always count on. The five may include family members.

Even more important than the number is how satisfied you feel about your friendships and social life. Do you feel connected to others? Are there people you can count on? Have fun with? Or is it time to put more energy into making friends?

Friends can help improve your wellbeing

Friendships can help you manage stress and cope with illness, loss and trauma. They can help you beat unhealthy habits like drinking too much or not getting enough exercise. Friendships can improve your health and increase your self-esteem and happiness.²

Ways to make and keep friendships

You may think you're too busy to make friends. Or perhaps you're shy. What can you do?

- **Spend less time on e-friendships.** Social media can make it seem that we're more connected than ever. Yet studies show that loneliness is on the rise.³ Experts say online friendships can't take the place of real human contact.⁴

On the other hand, social media can be a great way to locate old friends. It can help bridge distances and re-unite friends who may have lost track of each other for months or years.

- **Pursue your interests.** If you have a dog, join a dog park. If you love to read, join a book club. There are also gardening, cooking, hiking, biking and other hobby-related groups. Check the bulletin board at your supermarket or read the local newspaper for events. Volunteer, take a course or try an exercise class. These are all good ways to meet new people.
- **Get out there.** Accept invitations. It can be daunting to go to a party if you don't know many people — especially if you're shy. Here are two simple tips that may help:
 - **Smile.** People are attracted to others who look happy. When you wear a smile, you project confidence and ease.
 - **Use good listening skills.** Don't worry about what you're going to talk about. Instead, listen. You can often make a better impression by showing interest and asking about others. Talk less and listen more.
- **Thicken your skin.** Making new friends takes persistence and resilience. Don't take things too personally. If a friendship doesn't blossom, there's no benefit in dwelling on it. That will only hurt your confidence. Take a moment to feel let down but then move on.
- **Follow through.** Friends should be people we can count on. So if you tell someone you'll call or get in touch, do so. Otherwise you may ruin your credibility. Remember: Trust and reliability are keys to solid friendships at the start and throughout the relationship.

¹www.newyorker.com

²www.mayoclinic.org

³www.greatist.com

⁴www.thoughtcatalog.com

e-Thoughts — Reconnecting with old friends

September 2016 Newsletter



[Return to index page](#)

Our e-Thoughts feature provides close-up views on topics and areas of interest from everyday life.

It's easier than ever to find and renew old friendships

Have you ever lost touch with someone you really cared about? Maybe it was an old pal from high school, your college roommate or a friend from your first job or neighborhood? Sometimes people drift apart or lose touch without really intending to.

These days, it can be fairly easy to find and reconnect with people. Using Facebook and other social media, you can do the research to find your old friend. Who knows? It could be the continuation of a great relationship.

I'm big on reconnecting. For me, it began when I heard from a friend I hadn't seen or talked to in over 20 years. She posted a note to me on a school reunion web page and I found it a year after she wrote it. Luckily, she left all her contact information for me and it hadn't changed. I called her as soon as I read it and we chatted and laughed as if we had just seen each other yesterday.

Then I started to reach out to other people I missed in my life. It was fun and rewarding. I now talk to and meet up with a few college and high school friends I really enjoy. There are still some I haven't located, but I'm working on it. It's a challenge.

Think about people you might like to find and reconnect with. It's fun sharing old memories — and making new ones.

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Monthly Newsletter — September 2016

[Return to index page](#)

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