

Making and keeping friends

September 2016 Newsletter



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