



How to Make (AND KEEP) Friends

AS SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, WE WERE NEVER SHORT OF FRIENDS. We made friends in class and through extra-curricular activities and social functions. As we grow older it becomes harder to find friends. Our social circle diminishes, leaving us without friends who enjoy the things we enjoy. But developing and cultivating friendships keeps us healthy and happy.

So cherish the friends you have and make new ones whenever you can. Here are some ideas for finding friends who are worth their weight in gold.

Take an adult education class. Have a passion for cooking or want to learn about world history? Signing up for a class that interests you will not only be fun, it will allow you to meet other people with the same passion. After class, ask fellow students to join you for coffee to discuss the day's lesson.

Exercise. Exercise is more fun when done in a group, and you'll be more likely to keep up a fitness program when working out with a friend. Start a lunchtime walking group at work, invite a neighbor and her dog to join you and your own pet for nightly strolls, or take an Arthritis Foundation Aquatic class at the local Y (call 800/283-7800 or visit www.arthritis.org).

Take up a new hobby. Studies show that people who engage in hobbies or community activities have a lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. Local community centers offer an array of arts and crafts programs, from needlepoint to gardening clubs, and are a great place to meet people with similar interests.

Organize a book group, a cooking group or a movie group. Invite a group of acquaintances you would like to get to know better to discuss a new bestseller, try a new recipe or meet at the local cineplex. Slowly, but surely, everyone in the group will become closer and you'll hate having to miss a gathering.

— LISSA POIROT

why family is NOT ENOUGH

A RECENT STUDY SHOWED FRIENDS TRUMP FAMILY WHEN IT COMES TO RELATIONSHIPS THAT MAKE US HEALTHY AND HAPPY. Friendships can actually increase your life span by 10 years. Results of a 10-year Australian study of aging on more than 1,500 people, aged 70 and older, have found that friends, more than relatives, positively influence independence, build self-esteem, improve coping with chronic conditions and lower depression levels. Older people with strong circles of friends were 22 percent less likely to die during the 10-year period than people with fewer friends. The bigger surprise? Social networks made up of children and relatives had no effect on 10-year survival.

Lynne C. Giles, department of rehabilitation and aged care, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, thinks the reason behind this is as simple as the phrase, "You choose your friends, but you can't choose your family."

— SHERRY BALLOU HANSON

Get in Touch (Therapy) ... Research has shown that touch can ease pain. Massage stimulates blood flow and nourishes joints, and can help you let go of stress. But did you know that a light touch may be just as beneficial? A study of osteoarthritis patients at St. Margaret Memorial Hospital in Pittsburgh revealed a reduction of pain after touch therapy — a light touch over the entire body, especially where one feels pain. Want to try touch therapy? Contact local spas and massage therapists to see if they provide light-handed services.

— AMY BRAYFIELD