



## How Community and Social Connections Heal & Boost Longevity

### Message from Milly

Greetings to all,

After spending a wonderful few weeks with family from South Africa, I've been thinking a lot about the importance of connection and community in relation to health.



Even before the events of 2020, the medical and public health communities were aware of the growing epidemic of loneliness in developed countries.

In fact, there were even task forces and officials appointed to study and provide solutions to this growing problem.

Why? Because loneliness and isolation are key contributing factors to a variety of deadly and chronic diseases. Including heart disease and all-cause mortality.

We'll dive into the science behind this more in the next section.

But the point is: we can eat all the best foods, exercise regularly, and take all the best supplements in the world. **But, if we neglect our social health we put ourselves at *great* risk for physical, mental, and emotional disease.**

That said, in this post-pandemic digital world, it can be hard to make meaningful connections. Especially if you're new in

town, introverted, or don't have family close by.

If this sounds like you, don't fret (and know you're not alone). Coming up, we'll cover the science behind how being part of a community protects your health *and* how to create a community that supports and uplifts.

Blessings to all,

*-Milly*



## How Community, Family, and Friendships Protect Health and Promote Longevity

As health-conscious individuals, most of us make a point to keep up on the latest science on nutrition, herbs, lifestyle therapies, etc.

However, few of us are aware of the research behind how community heals, protects your health, and can even extend your life.

**Here are a few proven ways that community and a sense of belonging (or lack thereof) directly impact our overall health (I've provided references to all these points at the end):**

- Loneliness and isolation are as bad for your health as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, being obese, and/or having limited physical activity.
- Middle-aged men are some of the loneliest people in the world.
- Loneliness can trigger a psychological feeling of chronic "fight or flight", which impacts our entire body.
- Per the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) over one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of

adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated.

- Women who attend church or religious services live longer than those without a spiritual practice.
- Feeling lonely can negatively impact immunity. Which can exacerbate autoimmunity and make you more susceptible to getting sick.
- People who are surrounded by community live longer. Often into their 100s. You can read more about this in ["The Blue Zones"](#).
- People find it easier to make positive lifestyle changes, such as losing weight, within a community setting. The story of the Saddleback Community Church, in which one congregation worked together to lose over 250,000 combined pounds, outlined in the best-selling book: ["The Daniel Plan"](#), is a great example of this.
- Loneliness is most pervasive in groups with the highest social media use (wow!).
- A lack of social interaction has been associated with the following conditions:
  - Heart disease
  - Stroke
  - Depression/anxiety
  - Chronic stress
  - Suicide
  - Cancer
  - Insomnia and other sleep disorders
  - A 50% increased risk of dementia
  - 4X increased risk of death in heart failure patients
  - Impaired cognitive function
  - Immune insufficiency

#### References:

- [Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions, CDC](#)

- [The Biggest Health Threat to Middle Aged Men is Loneliness, NBC's "Today"](#)
- [Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults, NASEM](#)
- <https://Association of Religious Service Attendance With Mortality Among Women, JAMA>
- [Loneliness, An Epidemic? Harvard University](#)
- [Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words, Science Direct/Computers in Human Behavior](#)
- [Loneliness, dysphoria, stress and immunity: A role for cytokines](#)
- [Loneliness and social isolation increase cancer incidence in a cohort of Finnish middle-aged men. A longitudinal study, Psychiatric Research](#)

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## How to Create or Expand Your Support System

So, we've established beyond a shadow of a doubt that being lonely and isolated is not good for your health.

However, we live in a world that seems to celebrate extreme independence/isolation.

For instance, when we look at the research behind why middle aged men are so lonely, many experts believe it's because they don't want to appear weak.

I'd wager this is the case for many of us. We've somehow come to see the need for authentic connections as a sign of weakness.

So, let's just all agree today, based on all the science I just presented above (and the wonderful God-given commonsense we all possess) that seeking meaningful, face-to-face connection is actually a sign of intelligence, strength, and self-care.

Okay, now we have that settled here are some ways to create a healthy support system and avoid loneliness.

- **Surround yourself with people who lift you up**, not those who make you feel poorly about yourself.
- **Use online resources to make offline**



**connections.** Tools like Meetup, Eventbrite, Facebook, etc. are great for finding groups of like-minded people. Just don't linger online too long.

- Make a point to **reconnect with a friend or family member** at least once a week. Even a phone call (not text or messaging) can make a world of difference.
- **Volunteer for a cause that matters to you.** It's a great way to give back while meeting other people who care.
- **Start a Meetup** based on something that you enjoy and care about.
- **Have little ones?** Join a Mom's or Dad's group...or start one. Volunteer at your child's school, or join a homeschool co-op.
- **Learn something new.** Taking a class on a topic of interest is a great opportunity to be among like-minded people.
- **Host people!** Try setting up a monthly potluck at your home or a nearby park. Host a kickball game, or just have some people over for snacks and a movie. There doesn't have to be a special occasion for a party.
- **Workout in a group.** Yes, home workouts are convenient, but being part of a group class is a great way to surround yourself with other people who value their health. Plus, the extra motivation comes in handy.
- **Tap into your spiritual side.** Whether you feel drawn to attend a religious service, join a meditation group, or check out some other spiritual or personal growth opportunities, the research shows this is all great for your sense of community and purpose.
- **Go into the office.** If your job offers the option of working remotely or in-office, try going into the office more often. You'd be surprised how helpful a little workplace collaboration can be once you've been working alone for a while.
- **Get a pet.** There's plenty of research showing that pets are a great safeguard against loneliness. Plus, walking your dog (cat, bird, iguana, etc.) will automatically connect you with other animal lovers.
- **Join a health-focused group.** This will help you stay on-track with your health

goals, while connecting you with other health-conscious people and families. A couple examples (and there are dozens more) are [The Weston A Price Foundation](#) and [Holistic Minded Moms](#). Both of which have several chapters across the US.

These are just few ways you can start making more meaningful connections in your life. But you have to start somewhere!

The good news is, once you start putting yourself out there a bit more, the universe tends to respond in kind.



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### Want to Learn More? Check out these books:

My long-time friend, James Maskell, co-founder of the Functional Forum and Evolution of Medicine, has come out with a great new book on community healing called: [The Community Cure](#).

This is a great read for individuals and healthcare professionals on how to harness the power of community as a new model for disease prevention and better care.

[The Blue Zones](#) is also one of my favorite reads on the habits of centenarians. One of which is: they all are active in their families and communities.

And, as I mentioned in the previous section, [The Daniel Plan](#) is a wonderful read on how to use groups to improve health outcomes.