

The Importance of Connection

Social connections are critical for our health and wellbeing. Human beings are inherently social creatures, and we need interactions with others in order to thrive. The degree of social interaction we require is a more personal thing; there's no magic number of hours a week we need to spend with others, but there certainly is evidence that complete isolation is damaging to our mental and physical health.

How many of us put the time and effort we should into maintaining meaningful relationships with others? How often do we think "gosh, it's been ages since I caught up with X, I must call/email/text her" and then never do? How often when we are spending time with friends or family are we not fully present?

It's easy to get "too busy" to get in touch, but the reality is it's about priorities, and as with everything, it's about you making the choice to prioritise those things that are most **important** to you. Too often our 'prioritisation' is about doing whatever is quickest and easiest at the time, rather than what will ultimately bring us the greatest happiness – lying in bed instead of getting up and going for a run, takeaways instead of cooking dinner, collapsing in front of the TV instead of calling a friend.

Each morning as you think about your day, make sure that includes a thought about what you are going to do to nourish your existing relationships or grow new ones. Turn your phone off and be fully present over dinner with your partner, take a few minutes to send a quick email to a friend you haven't seen for a while, pause and chat for a few minutes with the new person at work.

Having meaningful connections becomes even more important when you are embarking on a journey of change - making change is always easier when you have social networks that support and encourage you. Sometimes you might be able to find members of your existing networks who are also ready to make changes so will gladly swap your usual Friday night drinks after work for a walk or run instead. If not, then now might be the time to start building some new networks based around your new lifestyle choices. Perhaps there's someone at work that you've never really talked to before because they were out running at lunchtime while you were hunched over your computer lunching from the vending machine. Try asking them for some running tips – most people are very happy to talk to anyone about a subject they are passionate about and you might find yourself with an offer to join them for those lunchtime runs as well!

Remember that as we grow and evolve on our journey through life it is natural for friendships to change. As we evolve so do our relationships; some will change and some will end as we move in different directions to those we were once close to. This is a natural and healthy process and one that we should embrace, not resist. This doesn't mean walking away from a friendship or relationship any time you have a difference of opinion with someone of course! We should celebrate our differences and cherish the opportunities for growth that these offer us as we listen to and take time to consider a different viewpoint to our own.

Don't forget: always approach your relationships, and indeed life in general, with an attitude of giving, not taking. What we send out to the world is exactly what we will receive back, so if you are sending love and support you will receive those in return, if you are sending neediness and longing you will likewise receive those in return.