

The Human Connection – Part 2

Social isolation is undermining the health and well-being of teens and seniors

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Part 1 of this article appeared in the January/February issue of *Wellness & Safety* available on the SIA website at www.sia-jpa.org.

In part one of “The Human Connection” we learned the importance of social interaction, specifically face-to-face contact. Evidence supports that social relationships not only improve our physical health but also have a profound impact on our mental health. Studies also indicate a significant reduction in stress levels, anxiety and depression among those who adequately socialize with others. By comparison, those who socialize less frequently often experience increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

With the many advancements in technology available to us today we can live our lives without even leaving our homes. We can grocery shop, visit a doctor, go to work, shop for clothes, talk with friends and family, and even receive an education without once stepping outside. Convenient, yes. Efficient, perhaps. But are we sacrificing our quality of health by living our lives this way? It’s true that these technological advancements have helped many during this unprecedented pandemic. But many would also argue that all this technology has had a far-reaching negative impact on interpersonal relationship skills. Studies consistently show that the less face-to-face interaction there is, the less resilience and compassion people have, two critical traits that help us manage our stress.

A study by the American Geriatrics Society found that regular contact with friends and family leads to a lower incidence of depression in the elderly. Other studies have found that social interaction improves memory and may even help decrease the risk of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. The Journal of Gerontology followed 12,000 patients for 10 years and found a strong correlation between dementia and loneliness, and also discovered that those who felt lonely had a 40 percent increased risk of dementia. Evidence continues to show that inadequate face-to-face contact has the potential to destroy the mental health of those we love.

In 1938 “The Harvard Study of Adult Development” was begun and remains the longest study in the world. The original focus of this study was to ascertain why some people lived long, healthy lives while others didn’t. The initial research followed 724 men,

divided into two groups. The first group of men were in their sophomore years at Harvard. The second group of men were from Boston’s poorest, most disadvantaged and troubled neighborhoods. Questionnaires, interviews, blood draws and medical histories were given year after year to try to learn what variables were the most influential for living long, healthy and happy lives. Throughout the study (which continues today) it was discovered that both groups experienced poverty, struggled with addiction, developed life-threatening illness, had failed marriages and experienced other hardships. All of which suggests that status and privilege have little effect on longevity. (Not surprisingly, the young people surveyed about their most important goals in life consistently pointed to the accumulation of wealth, fame and success. So is society selling them snake oil by suggesting their dreams will come true if they just sacrifice their mental and physical health while pursuing them? Or does the premise that money and fame won’t buy health and happiness still hold true? According to this study the answer to the latter is a resounding yes.)

A life without human connection, love and happiness is a road to an early grave. Close relationships and social ties cannot guarantee a life without strife, but they can help us withstand



‘The key to healthy aging is relationships, relationships, relationships.’

- George Vaillant, psychiatrist,
Harvard Study of Adult Development

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- Stay motivated to exercise
- Fitness trends for 2021

Staying motivated to move can be a mental as well as a physical exercise

Eric Thygesen, SIA Prevention Services

New Year's resolutions by now have been long forgotten. It can be hard to stay motivated with all the distractions that bombard us. Exercise often seems like a chore and can easily be shoved aside. To rejuvenate your motivation, put these quick and easy tips into action. These tips can also be applied to other things in your life that need organization and planning:

- Start your week off strong.
 - o Research has shown that exercise on a Monday makes people more likely to exercise throughout the rest of the week.
- Write out what you want to accomplish.
 - o This can be for the day, week, month, etc. Have it written down so that when it comes time to do it, there's not that overwhelming feeling of, "What was I supposed to do?" "What did that article say?" "How many squats?" Be organized and you'll be more likely to get things done.
- Track your progress.
 - o Knowing the starting point is important. It can be hard to stay motivated if you don't know how far you've come. This simple thing can keep you motivated to continue to see more results in the future.
 - o Write down what you did each time you exercise.
 - Example: Today I did 30 minutes of walking and I tried to see how many sit-ups I could do. I was able to do 10 without stopping!
- Tell friends and family your goals.
 - o Telling someone what you want to accomplish can help keep your eye on the prize. It holds you more accountable.
- Keep it simple.
 - o The more complicated the workout, the less likely you're going to want to start. Keep the first few workouts simple. Pick something you know you can accomplish. Success early on when creating good habits is so crucial.



Here's what's trending in fitness for 2021

Eric Thygesen, SIA Prevention Services

Every year the American College of Sports Medicine does a worldwide survey of fitness trends. This list is not of top "fads" in the exercise industry but of trends. Most of the time this data is used by different people in the exercise profession to better prepare for the coming year. However, I think this list is good for all of us to see because it gives us some insight as to where exercise is headed.

It was quite a year in 2020 and the fitness industry had to make huge adjustments. In past years we've seen high-intensity interval training (HIIT) and wearable technology at the top. This year the number one fitness trend is online training. This should come as no surprise with what we've all faced with COVID-19.

This list is meant to spark your interest and in no way is meant to influence you to purchase or buy anything. You need to make decisions based on what you think is right for you. As always, we encourage you to speak with your physician or healthcare provider if you're unsure of what types of exercise you should be doing.

Below is a list of top 20 fitness trends for 2021:

- 1 Online training
- 2 Wearable technology
- 3 Body weight training
- 4 Outdoor activities
- 5 HIIT
- 6 Virtual training
- 7 Exercise as medicine
- 8 Strength training with free weights
- 9 Fitness programs for older adults
- 10 Personal training
- 11 Health/wellness coaching
- 12 Mobile exercise apps
- 13 Employing certified fitness professionals
- 14 Functional fitness training
- 15 Yoga
- 16 Exercise for weight loss
- 17 Group training
- 18 Lifestyle medicine
- 19 Licensure for fitness professionals
- 20 Outcome measurements

Resources: Thompson, Walter R. Ph.D., FACSM Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends for 2021, ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal: 1/2 2021 - Vol 25 - Issue 1

Social isolation can be deadly

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life's hardships and physical challenges. Without human connection, mental and physical decline is inevitable. Taking care of your physical health is important, but nurturing and cultivating your personal relationships can pay even bigger dividends when it comes to self-care. The vital role that relationships play in our health and happiness is best stated by Dr. George Vaillant, a psychiatrist who worked with researchers on the Harvard Study of Adult Development: "The key to healthy aging is relationships, relationships, relationships."

With more and more research finding loneliness and depression on the rise, it's not surprising that AARP, an organization geared toward adults over age 50, developed a program called Connect2Affect, designed to heighten awareness about how isolation can cause harm to both physical and mental health. By taking an active role in promoting social connectedness, the program helps participants increase the number and quality of their social contacts. Other organizations, like Senior Planet and Element3 Health, are likewise hard at work offering their own participants more ways to socially connect with others.

Even before the worldwide pandemic (COVID-19) hit, social distancing was not a part of our vernacular, yet it was a part of our behavior largely due to the advent of social media. The number of people who say they have no close friends has nearly tripled since 1985. Time magazine points out that "the many Facebook friends you have orbiting your digital galaxy aren't the ones who matter when it comes to your health and happiness." With teen isolation on the rise, so too is depression, suicide, anxiety, drug use and physical violence in this population. The correlation doesn't necessarily mean causation, but we'd be foolish to think that these kids are not reaching out for help.

Another area of concern is the impact of isolation on the elderly. This pandemic has hit them particularly hard both physically and mentally. While it's of serious concern that they're at an especially high risk of dying from the virus, the isolation among this group has become an even bigger worry. Being active, both physically and socially, has always been something most seniors have enjoyed daily without even thinking about it. Then the lockdown hit and suddenly the routines most seniors knew and relied on were gone. Phone calls with friends to keep in touch became less frequent and often just ended. Families couldn't visit. Exercise classes and activities, which were social staples, were suddenly cancelled. As the activities ended, so did their motivation to stay fit on their own. With no clear end to the pandemic in sight, depression among the elderly took hold



in a big way and continues to rise in this group. For many the will to live itself has been challenged.

Even as stay-at-home orders are being lifted and vaccines are becoming more available, depression among the elderly is becoming increasingly serious. This is because even "perceived loneliness" (discussed in Part 1) can be as detrimental to mental health as the real thing. It's heartbreaking to hear the despair many of this generation feel.

With the uncertainty of the COVID-19 virus, there are certain routines that can help bring back some normalcy to day-to-day living. They include:

- Sticking to a routine (getting up at the same time, eating at the same time, etc.);
- Taking a walk around the apartment complex or around the block, setting an alarm and making this a must-do activity;
- Working on a project (gardening, art, music, puzzles, home improvement, cooking, learning a language, etc.);
- Reading a book – joining a book club (online if necessary) is even better;
- Watching a documentary – and journaling about it afterward;
- Trying out a new hobby;
- Getting a neighbor, friend or family member to do a drive-by greeting - rolling the window down and chatting for a bit while everyone keeps their social distance;
- Taking phone photos, picking a subject every week and gathering as many photos as possible, then making a photo collage, printed or online.
- Playing cards - solitaire, poker, Sudoku, etc. (online or with others) and even across balconies if that works;
- Enjoying music - listening, dancing or singing to help tap into the other senses.

As human beings we're designed to be social; that's just who we are. No one will argue that this pandemic has been full of challenges. But there are also creative solutions. Appreciating your health and happiness often comes from realizing that it takes work and some innovation. Today is here, so do what you can to foster your social connections in any way possible. Protect your mind, your health and your happiness!

Resources:

The Epoch Times, Mind & Body Section, Aug. 26, 2020

Ted Talk, What Makes a Good Life @ <https://youtu.be/8KkKuTCFvZI>

Harvard Adult Development Study, <https://www.adultdevelopmentstudy.org/>

Journal of Gerontology, <https://www.geron.org/publications/journals/the-journals-of-gerontology-series-a-biological-sciences-and-medical-sciences>

British Medical Journal, <https://www.bmj.com/>



- Eye ergonomics
- Laughter is good medicine

Ergonomics for your eyes: blink, rest, adjust

Spending long hours on the computer can contribute to eye strain, fatigue and headaches. Computer users may also experience dry eye from blinking less. Studies have shown that focusing on computer screens and other digital displays may reduce your blink rate by a third to a half, reducing the moisture you get from blinking at a normal rate. To help reduce dry eye and eye strain, consider these eye ergonomic tips:

- Stay at arm's length. The eyes work harder to see close up than far away. If you have a desktop computer, try placing the monitor at arm's length. You may need to adjust the type to appear larger at a distance.
- Give your eyes a break. Follow the 20-20-20 rule: Take a break every 20 minutes by looking at an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
- Lighten up. When your screen is much brighter than your surroundings, your eyes have to work harder to see. Adjusting your environmental lighting can reduce eyestrain. Also try increasing the contrast on your monitor.

If you're experiencing continual dry eyes or eye pain, contact your eye doctor for further assistance.



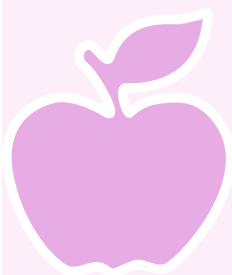
April is National Humor Month

Bring more humor to your life!

- **It makes us feel good.** Laughter is the key to our souls! It makes us happy and brings us together.
- **It's healthy.** Not only does humor make us feel good, laughing is actually good for our brains and reduces stress levels.
- **It's a good personality trait.** Most people are drawn to others with a sense of humor.
- **Surround yourself with funny people.** Spend time with your friends and reminisce about things that make each of you laugh until it hurts.
- **Tell daily jokes.** Act silly or share a funny joke with a friend.

Source: Nationaltoday.com/national-humor-month

QUOTE TO NOTE



Laugh as much as possible,
always laugh. It's the sweetest
thing one can do for oneself
and one's fellow human beings.

— Maya Angelou

Use WeTip

For more information

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The material in this newsletter should be part of your Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP).

Keep a copy of this newsletter in your IIPP binder and be sure all employees receive a copy.