

Monthly Health Challenge™

# Strengthen Social Bonds



**CHALLENGE**

Make time to connect with others

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read “Strengthen Social Bonds.”
2. Make time in your schedule to connect with others
3. Keep up this habit for a lifetime of good health.



When South Carolina resident Eustace Conway left home with a backpack and some hiking boots, he wasn't going camping with friends.

Instead, he stepped on to the Appalachian Trail...alone. He walked 2,190 miles, surviving on food he could find in the wild. And that solo adventure was just the beginning.

He floated down the Mississippi River in a home-made canoe...alone. He kayaked across Alaska... alone. He even rode a horse across the entire United States. And while he's spent long periods of time during his life alone, he's happy. Why? He makes friends along the way. He enjoys staying connected and being part of a community.

You may not be planning a solo trip. But do you live alone, or feel alone? How would you rate your relationships at home or at work? Excellent, fair, could be better? Healthy and positive social connections can have a powerful impact on your happiness, health, and longevity.<sup>1</sup> Take the month-long Health Challenge to Strengthen Social Bonds.

**Do you have healthy social bonds? Take the quiz.**

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1.   People with strong social bonds recover faster from illness or injury.
2.   Chronic loneliness has no impact on how long you will live.
3.   Half of all adults feel alone, isolated, or left out, at times.
4.   Long-term loneliness may be just as harmful as smoking cigarettes.
5.   People with a supportive group of friends eat healthier and get more exercise.

How did you do? Research shows your social network can impact your health. If you have strong social bonds, you'll live longer. Laughing or talking with friends can make you feel better and improve your mood. You're also more likely to be active and make better food choices when you have strong social bonds. Don't have strong social bonds? Now is always the best time to make friends and nurture relationships.

*Answers: 1. True. 2. True. 3. False. 4. True. 5. True.*

## Have a Heart for Yourself...and Others

Want to live longer? It's a topic Harvard researcher Dr. Robert Waldinger has been studying for decades.<sup>2</sup>

He and other health researchers have spent hours looking for the secrets to health and long life. It turns out genetics, health habits, and living conditions aren't the only factors.

“The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health,” says Waldinger.

So what's the secret to a long and healthy life? Research shows these nine things make a difference:

1. Keep on learning.
2. Don't smoke – quit if you do.
3. Avoid or limit alcohol.
4. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
5. Be physically active.
6. Maintain a healthy weight.
7. Sleep 7 to 8 hours a night.
8. Learn to adapt to events and situations.
9. And last but not least, build strong bonds with others.

Good connections improve healthy, longevity [tinyurl.com/okgjwzg](http://tinyurl.com/okgjwzg)

# How to Build Strong Social Bonds



The young Caitlin Alifrenka had some homework. Write a letter to some kid in Zimbabwe. She wrote the letter and mailed it off. Her young pen pal Martin Ganda received the letter a short time later...and he was thrilled. He wrote back, and Caitlin replied. That was almost 20 years ago, and the two are still friends. They even worked together to write the book: *I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives*.



If you want to build strong bonds with others at home or at work, you have to be willing to do your part. And it's really not that hard. Here are some things you can do to build strong social bonds with others:

## Keep promises

If you say you're going to get a project done on deadline, or plan to meet a friend for coffee, clear your schedule to make it happen. If you don't think you can do it, don't make a promise and then back out.

## Be dependable

When people know they can count on you to get stuff done, follow-through, and take action, you'll build a stronger bond. It didn't take long for Caitlin and Martin to realize both were dependable and would always write back.

## Be honest

Long before Abraham Lincoln was president, he worked in a small store. When he realized he short-changed a shopper a few cents, he closed the store and walked miles to deliver the correct change. It's one of many acts of honesty that earned him the nickname, "Honest Abe." At home and at work, be honest. It really is the best policy.

## Apologize

Stuff happens. People make mistakes. You miss a meeting. You can't make it to your kid's soccer game. The company email you wrote has typos. If you really want to build stronger bonds with others, let people know you're sorry when you've done something wrong or made a mistake.

One recent study found that strong bonds with others are good for your heart and your health.<sup>9</sup>

They help reduce stress and lower your risk for heart disease.<sup>4</sup> They help ward off depression and loneliness. And they help slow age-related memory loss.

## Listen

There's at least one reason Ernest Hemingway was such a great writer with a literary gift. He was a good listener. "When people talk, listen completely," said Hemingway. "Most people never listen." The next time someone is talking to you, listen.

Focus on what they're saying. And the next time you have something to say, they'll be more likely to listen, too.

Service strengthens social bonds  
[tinyurl.com/p5gqdra](https://tinyurl.com/p5gqdra)

## Be supportive

Let's face it. Work life and family life don't always jive. And stuff happens, like a death in the family, car accident, career changes, family matters, or financial woes. When a friend or co-worker is facing a challenge, be supportive, and step in to help out when you can. Send a letter, text message, or email. Call or stop by, just to let them know you care.

## Share a laugh

Sharing a laugh with family and friends helps build stronger bonds.<sup>5</sup> Share a funny joke. Post humorous comics outside your office door. You might even forward a laugh-out-loud video to cheer up a friend. Or watch a funny movie together. Actress Audrey Hepburn understood how helpful laughter can be when she said, "I love people who make me laugh. I honestly think it's the thing I like most, to laugh. It cures a multitude of ills. It's probably the most important thing in a person."

Make the effort to build strong social bonds with others. You'll feel happier, be healthier, and live longer.

Share a laugh for better health  
[tinyurl.com/hnw2p97](https://tinyurl.com/hnw2p97)

## References

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# Strengthen Social Bonds



## CHALLENGE

Make time to connect with others

### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Create your own plan to make time to connect with others.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to develop this healthy habit. At the end of the month, total the number of days you made time to connect with others. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete this challenge. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

| MONTH:                      |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |                             | HC = Health Challenge™  | ex. min. = exercise minutes |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| SUNDAY                      | MONDAY                      | TUESDAY                     | WEDNESDAY                   | THURSDAY                    | FRIDAY                      | SATURDAY                    | Weight & weekly summary |                             |
| HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ |                         |                             |
| HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ |                         |                             |
| HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ |                         |                             |
| HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ |                         |                             |
| HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ | HC<br>[ ]<br>ex. min. _____ |                         |                             |

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I made time to connect with others

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I was physically active for at least 30 minutes

Other wellness projects completed this month:

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



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