



“Retirement Living At Its Best”



STUDIES CONNECT SOCIALIZING WITH QUALITY OF LIFE

The relationship between physical activity and vitality is well-documented, but multiple recent studies have also revealed an increasingly stronger link between social interaction and mental and physical well-being for seniors.

While socialization is critical for all people, regardless of age, seniors can be more susceptible to isolation. Many seniors have spent a considerable portion of their lives in the company of others – be it in the workplace or raising children. Upon reaching retirement age, and with children leaving the house, the opportunities for socialization often decrease, especially if the senior must rely on others for transportation.

But research has indicated that an active social lifestyle is more important than ever in helping seniors maintain a sharp mind, remain connected to the world around them, increase feelings of happiness, and develop a sense of belonging.

Various studies have shown that socializing can produce the following positive effects:



Improved mental health: Symptoms of depression and memory problems affect many seniors. In fact, approximately seven million people over the age of 65 experience symptoms of depression, and it is estimated that dementia touches one in seven Americans over the age of 71. Having consistent human contact and interaction can reduce both recent studies revealed.

One such study, appearing in the *Annals of Family Medicine*, gathered 193 seniors with depressive symptoms and provided either individualized physical activity or social visits for six consecutive months. Researchers concluded that: “Social contact may be as effective as physical activity in improving mood and quality of life” and “social participation and social support networks are paramount to long-term positive outcomes and psychological well-being for older people”

Improved nutrition: The need for proper nutrition is vital for seniors, but healthy habits can be difficult to maintain when living alone. “Approximately 35 percent of elderly people suffer from malnutrition,” said Marie-Jeanne Kergoat, a professor at the Université de Montréal. Kergoat and others conducted a study among hospitalized seniors and discovered a correlation between food intake and social interaction: “patients ate more when social interactions were friendly and lively”.

Strength in numbers: When it comes to socializing, the more the merrier. According to a recent AARP article “the number of Americans without any close confidants has risen dramatically in the past 20 years” and “even though Americans are closer to their spouses than ever before, that kind of intimacy can work against us if we allow ourselves to 'cocoon within the relationship'”. Plus, seniors in large groups are more likely to encourage healthy habits among each other, including exercise.

How can seniors stay socially connected?

Many seniors have family members or other caregivers who periodically interact with them, but that is often not adequate socialization. While it's comforting for seniors to know their needs are met, sufficient social interaction includes participation or consistently engaging with others, primarily with peers.

Below are avenues for seniors to stay socially connected:

- Volunteer
- Join clubs and groups
- Visit senior centers
- Move to retirement communities
- Stay connected with friends and family
- Get a pet
- Attend a church
- Learn new skills
- Learn to use the internet



It is not uncommon for seniors to resist change, and some may need gentle encouragement to get more socially involved, but the benefits of an active social lifestyle reach well into the future.

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