

The Human Connection (Part 1)

Socialization is key to health, well-being

Deborah R Camacho, MS, SIA Prevention Services

When we think about improving our health, most people immediately think of diet and exercise. While these are important components of good health, there's one other that's often overlooked: The simple and more enjoyable one known as socialization. There's never been a time in history when this has become more apparent, and yet been more elusive, as we navigate daily life during a worldwide pandemic. What is socialization and how exactly does it improve health? Looking at the science behind these questions will provide some answers and help us add new, health-enhancing socialization strategies to our lives.



...Science has...identified one specific form of socialization that's key to improving our human connection: face-to-face contact.

good health, but what's most notable about the Blue Zones is the ability of the people who live in these areas to prioritize personal relationships and incorporate socialization into daily life. The socialization element is the one key factor that sets the Blue Zones apart from the rest of the world.

With growing evidence of the importance of socialization and, more importantly, face-to-face contact, it's both heartbreaking and alarming to learn that about a quarter of our own population has no social interaction at all. Studies have found that having active and meaningful social lives may be critical to having long and healthy lives in general, and this fact may be best illustrated in Sardinia, a small island off the coast of Italy. Sardinia has six

Researchers worldwide have spent decades studying those who've aged well. They've identified certain areas around the world, called Blue Zones, where people routinely live to be 100 years old and older. As previously mentioned, diet and exercise are formidable factors for

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Meal Planning 101: Building a system that works for you

By Lyn Poll, M.S., SIA Prevention Services

Meal planning is a great way to save time, money and reduce stress. Yet not all meal planning strategies are a "one size fits all" solution. If you've tried meal planning and it hasn't worked for you, it's not because you're terrible at meal planning, you just haven't found the method that works best for your goals and daily routine. Meal planning can be used for all your meals, or for just one meal segment. For example, I only meal plan for dinner, but usually have enough left over to take for lunch the next day.

What exactly is meal planning? Meal planning is literally having a plan for what meals you're going to make or eat throughout the week. It's flexible, adaptable and can be tailored to fit your unique needs. It's not meal prepping - the function of preparing whole meals or dishes ahead of time - which is more rigid, doesn't offer a lot of variety and can feel like a restrictive diet.

Many potential meal planning attempts fail because we try to follow someone else's meal planning strategy instead of developing our own. Trying to follow someone else's plan might work for a bit, but following a plan that's designed specifically with your tastes and preferences will pretty much always work better. It may take a few tries before you develop a meal planning system that's right for your goals and lifestyle, but be flexible and "tweak" things a few times before throwing in the kitchen towel. Also, be prepared to adjust your system as things change over the years, sometimes over months, especially if you have



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- Create easy weekly plans that can work for two meals or seven

Meal Planning 101

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children with busy schedules.

Getting Started.

Keep in mind as you embark on developing your meal plan that a successful meal plan should make you feel:

- More aware of what's in your refrigerator.
- More aware of whether you're cooking or ordering out today.
- Less wasteful, particularly of fresh produce.
- Less stressed about cooking, grocery shopping, and those nights when delivery is the correct answer.
- More creative and capable in the kitchen.

Pick One Or Two Goals.

The most important question to ask yourself when meal planning is what your goals are. Pick one or two goals and don't overwhelm yourself. Your goals could be to reduce food waste, to feel less overwhelmed, to have more variety, to eat out less, to eat better, to save money, to refine your cooking skills or to just discover some easy, tasty meals that can easily go into a regular dinner rotation. Whatever your goals, defining them makes it a lot easier to plan how much energy will go into cooking, shopping and recipe-hunting. Remember, the simplicity of picking just a couple of goals initially will lead to better success.

Decide How Often You Want To Cook.

When it comes to habit formation, it's good to start small. Start with one to two nights a week and add more as you get used to the cadence and figure out what fits into your schedule and budget. Ask yourself:

- Realistically, how many nights a week do I want to cook?
- How many nights a week am I OK with ordering out?
- Am I going to save any of these leftovers for lunch, breakfast or future dinners?

For example, in a typical five-day work week, you might start with planning meals for one night a week, making sure each meal is big enough for leftovers, and planning one night a week for going out or ordering in. That leaves two to three nights for you to decide what you want to do the rest of the week. And if you generate enough leftovers, you can use them for lunches throughout the week if they're not being used as dinners for the rest of the week.

Decide How Often You Want To Grocery Shop.

Before heading to the store, gather a few of your favorite recipes, either online or from a cookbook, grab a piece of note paper (I use a small magnetic white board with the days of the

week that sticks on my refrigerator), check what ingredients you have on hand and then determine what you need to buy. By planning for shopping and figuring out your budget, you'll be able to waste less food and money. The less often you plan to grocery shop, the more uses you'll need to get out of the groceries you buy. If grocery shopping is not your bag, then check out the many online services that provide delivery.

Extra Tip: Look for recipes that use many of the same ingredients to save time, money and food waste. For example, maybe one night is spaghetti with meat sauce while another night is tacos or hamburgers. Buying in bulk is much less expensive than buying smaller individual packages and many items can be frozen.

Your Freezer Is Your Friend.

Extra spaghetti sauce, cooked meat or fresh herbs about to go bad? Freeze them. For those nights when you just can't be bothered to cook but don't feel like ordering out, having frozen leftovers is almost as good as having a fresh-cooked meal. Work these frozen treasures into your meal plan and reduce the amount of new cooking you need to do on any given night.

Beyond freezing leftovers, there are lots of fresh ingredients that easily can be frozen for future use as well. If you're not sure if something can be frozen or how to freeze it correctly, Google it! You'll be surprised at how many things can be frozen and how much you can save by freezing.

Keep Your Plan Visible.

It's important that you write down your plan and grocery list, especially if you're meal planning with other people. You'll also need to write down who's responsible for cooking if there's more than one cook in the house.

As mentioned previously, I have a white board on the refrigerator that's placed at eye-level so it's impossible to miss. I also have a magnetic cup with pens and erasers right next to my list. If this isn't for you, try a basic app planner or weekly paper planning lists that can be purchased or printed from the computer. For our family, the more visual the planner, the better, which is why the white board works for us.

Extra Tip: Save your sources! Be sure to write down where you found the recipe so you can easily locate it when you're ready. Create a space to save recipes you like so you can make them again. For example, I use a three-ring binder with recipes that I've printed out or torn out of magazines/cookbooks. I've placed the recipes in sheet protectors (helps keep the recipes clean) and use recipe category dividers from Amazon to help organize them. I keep the ones we like and toss the ones we don't. You can also use Pinterest or other recipe-saving apps for digital recipes.

I've been meal planning for many years and have several "homemade" cookbooks with recipes tailored to our preferences.

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The Human Connection: Socialization is a building block of longevity

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times more centenarians than does the Italian mainland and 10 times more than in North America. What's even more intriguing is that the men live as long as the women. By comparison, U.S. women outlive men by an average of five years and Russian women outlive men by an average of 11 years. These stark contrasts significantly highlight the cultural and lifestyle perspectives of countries where social engagement is encouraged regardless of age and gender.

Knowing the importance of socialization in living a long, healthy life means recognizing this fact and understanding what that looks like in your world. Socialization can take on many forms, yet science has zeroed in on the differences and identified one specific form of socialization that's key to improving our human connection: face-to-face contact.

There's a clear distinction between face-to-face interaction and simply seeing someone on the computer screen or talking with someone on the phone.

"Face-to-face contact releases a whole litany of neurotransmitters," says psychologist Susan Pinker, adding that just making eye contact with someone or shaking hands or even giving someone a high five is enough to produce oxytocin, the hormone that makes us feel good and helps lower cortisol, our stress hormone. When we have meaningful face-to-face contact, our bodies release dopamine, which makes us feel good and helps kill pain. It's like the body releases its very own, naturally produced morphine. Communication through technology simply cannot provide the same kinds of benefits that real, human connections can.

With most of the world social distancing as a safety precaution due to the current pandemic, we need to be aware of the implications this has on our society and on those who rely on social interaction for their happiness and well-being. For our elderly, teens and special-needs populations, the lack of social interaction impacts their mental and physical health. Researchers have found that more than 80 percent of people communicate with a friend or family member daily, most of which is done by

face-to-face contact. To upend this behavior, whether warranted or not, can elicit depression, anxiety, weight loss, stress, suicide, migraines and anger. Obviously, with the pandemic, this presents a complicated situation. But because humans are social creatures, it's imperative that we maintain an awareness of these potentially ugly side effects and work toward solutions that don't compromise the fundamentals of mental, physical and emotional health.

Some doctors around the world prescribe socializing to their patients, just as they do medication. Many incorporate questions about their patients' social circles and social behavior

into their health history questionnaires. One doctor

who works with the geriatric population says he once believed that diet, exercise and genes

played the biggest roles in aging well,

but that after talking with his patients has come to understand that regular

and consistent social interaction is the real common denominator for healthy aging.

One study in a British medical journal revealed that those with poor social connections had a 29 percent increased risk of heart disease and a 32 percent increased

risk of stroke. What was more surprising

was the fact that even "perceived loneliness" has a negative impact on health. Another study at Brigham Young University showed that decreased social connections led to a 50 percent higher risk of early death and can be as harmful as obesity and smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Even arthritis has been shown to increase as social connections decrease.

Socialization has long been associated with many health benefits, such as lower blood pressure, enhanced mood, higher pain threshold and even improved immunity. Conversely, a lack of social interaction impacts health in much the same way as chronic disease or harmful lifestyle choices do.

In part two of The Human Connection in our March/April issue of *Wellness & Safety*, we'll focus on the mental health aspects of socialization and what we can do going forward.



Communication through technology simply cannot provide the same kinds
of benefits that real, human connections can.



- Free virtual trainings for useful tips and tools
- Hand, wrist workout routine

Meal Planning 101

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Now, along with the occasional new recipe, I have family favorites right at my fingertips. How cool and easy is that?

Read Recipes In Advance.

It might seem like this goes without saying, but speaking from experience it needs to be said: Read the recipe while you're planning to make sure you don't start cooking at 6 p.m., only to realize that your recipe requires a 24-hour marinade or two-hour soaking period.



Extra Tip: If your recipe requires some prep, make a note on your planning list/pad/app when you need to start it, so you don't forget.

Most Importantly, Be Adaptable.

If you know you have a jam-packed week ahead, don't make it harder on yourself by planning three nights of home-cooked meals back-to-back. And don't over-think or overcomplicate your meals. There's nothing wrong with three nights of cooking with two nights of takeout, or vice-versa, if that's what gets the food on the table.

My point is that you're a busy person. Be flexible. Planning is good, but the best-laid plans have plenty of room to flex. Be forgiving with yourself; you can always cook more next week. And most importantly, remember that at the end of the day, meal planning is about making your life easier.

Free Virtual Trainings

Maximizing Your Credit - Tips and Tools to Improve Your Credit Score

February 18, 2021 – 12 noon

Good credit is fundamental to financial health and well-being. In this session from SAFE Credit Union, you'll revisit the fundamental elements of good credit and the importance of good credit in everyday life, and learn tips, tools and strategies to improve your bottom line. Topics to be covered include:

- * Understanding the difference between scoring models
- * Reading and understanding your credit report
- * Learning strategies to improve your credit score

[Webinar Registration - Zoom](#)

Guard Your Identity

March 18, 2021 – 12 noon

According to Experian, consumers reported \$1.48 billion in total fraud losses in 2018. If identity theft is a growing concern for you, join a discussion that covers:

- ID theft: What is it and how does it happen?
- The many types of ID theft impacting consumers
- How ID theft impacts us all
- Ways to protect your identity and minimize risk

[Webinar Registration - Zoom](#)



Give your hands and wrists a stretch

Wrist rotation – Make a fist and rotate your entire hand from the wrist in one direction. Repeat 15 times. Switch directions and repeat 15 times. Then release your hands, and with fingers extended, do the same rotations.

Hand stretch – Make a fist, then extend your fingers as far apart as possible. Hold for about 10 seconds. Relax. Repeat the entire sequence five to 10 times until hands and fingers feel relaxed.



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contact Teresa Franco at tfranco@sia-jpa.org or 916-364-1281, ext. 1256.



1-800-78-CRIME

Get creative to get kids to brush

February is National Children's Dental Health Month

Is getting your kids to brush and floss like pulling teeth? Here are some ways to make the experience positive, creative and fun while building a lifetime of healthy smiles:

Up to 1 year old

Introduce words such as "dentist" and "toothbrush" to your child's vocabulary to get an early start on their dental knowledge. Take your child to the dentist by age 1 or within six months of the arrival of the first tooth. Your dentist and hygienist can provide tips for developing a good oral healthy routine.

2 to 4 years old

Let your children pick their own toothbrush and toothpaste. There are plenty of fun colors, characters and flavors to choose from. Then, crank up the music while you help them brush. Be sure to model good behavior by showing your children how you brush and floss and letting them practice on a doll or other toy.



5 to 7 years old

Use a calendar and stickers to keep track of your child's brushing and flossing. Provide plenty of praise. Then, offer rewards such as a new toy, favorite game or later bedtime to celebrate milestones. There are also many terrific books about good oral health, the Tooth Fairy and visiting the dentist.

8 to 11 years old

Find a virtual timer your kids will enjoy. Or buy an old-school timer that can sit in the bathroom to help your kids brush for two full minutes. Need more ideas? Check out grinforkids.com for fun activities that teach kids about oral health, including science experiments.

12+ years

Embrace your child's love of technology by incorporating it into their oral health routine with an electric toothbrush or water flosser. Then, encourage your preteens and teens to keep brushing and flossing regularly so they have smiles they're proud to show!

Source: Delta Dental



QUOTE TO NOTE



"There's a world of difference between insisting on someone's doing something and establishing an atmosphere in which that person can grow into wanting to do it."

- Mr. Rogers

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.

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