Make Meaningful Connections



Build social bonds for better health

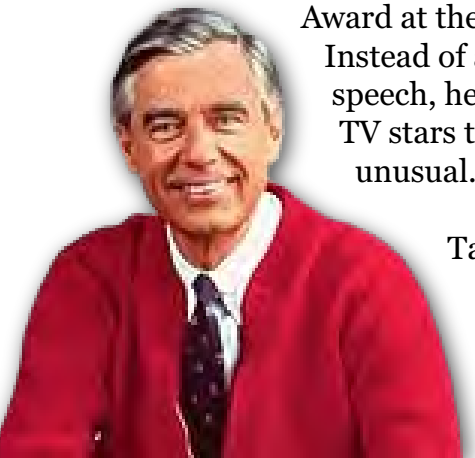
Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™:
1. Read "Make Meaningful Connections."
2. Make time to build social bonds and connect with others.
3. Keep a record of your completed health challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

Before he became Mister Rogers, Fred Rogers got his start in children's TV in Canada. In the 1960s, he hosted a 15-minute show called *Misterogers* on the CBC in Toronto.



Later, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* ran for more than 30 years on public TV. Generations of kids grew up with his cardigan sweaters and his simple message: "I like you just the way you are."

In 1997, Rogers received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Daytime Emmys. Instead of a long thank-you speech, he asked a room full of TV stars to do something unusual.



Take 10 seconds of silence to think about the people who helped them become who they are. The special ones who "loved us into being."

Fred Rogers, host of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood.*





Then he looked at his watch and waited.

How would you rate your relationships at home and at work? Excellent? Fair? Could be better?

Eating well and staying active are key to a healthy life. But strong relationships can have a powerful impact on your health, happiness, and longevity, too.

Take the month-long Health Challenge to Make Meaningful Connections.

CONNECTIONS ▶



The Secret to a Long & Healthy Life

Why strong relationships matter more than you think

In 1938, Harvard researchers began following a group of 724 young men to find out what keeps people healthy and happy as they age. More than 85 years later, the study is still going, and now includes their children.[2]



The biggest surprise? Relationships.

People who were the most satisfied with their relationships at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80.

Relationship satisfaction was a better predictor of healthy aging than cholesterol levels.

"Everybody needs at least one solid relationship, someone whom they feel they can count on in times of need," says Dr. Robert Waldinger, the study's director.

The U.S. Surgeon General agrees. Lacking social connection is linked to a higher risk of heart disease, stroke, dementia, depression, anxiety, and early death.

On the flip side, strong social bonds can help you manage stress, stay active, and make healthier choices.

CONNECTIONS ▶



Quiz: Make the Connection

How much do you know about the health benefits of connecting with others? Take the quiz to find out.

T | F

1. ☐☐ Cholesterol levels at midlife predict healthy aging better than happy relationships do.

2. ☐☐ Loneliness has no impact on how long you live.



3. ☐☐ About half of U.S. adults report feeling lonely.

4. ☐☐ Lacking social connection can be as harmful as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.

5. ☐☐ Most people underestimate how much a friend will appreciate hearing from them.

Check your answers. How did you do? Research shows your social connections have a big impact on your health.[1]



People who feel connected to others tend to live longer and healthier lives.

Don't have strong social bonds? It's never too late to start making friends and nurturing relationships.

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

7 Easy Ways to Connect with Others



Building healthier relationships takes a little effort. But it's not that hard to get started.

"Our social life is a living system, and it needs maintenance too," says Dr. Robert Waldinger.

Here are seven ways to connect with others:

1 Keep promises

If you say you'll finish a project on deadline or meet a friend for coffee, clear your schedule to make it happen.

- **If you don't think you can do it,** don't make the promise.
- **And if you need more time or can't follow through,** let people know as soon as possible.

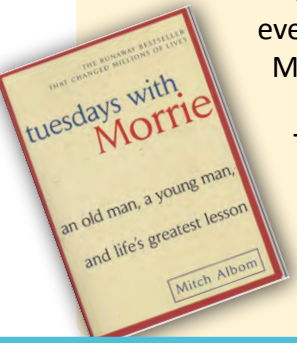
2 Be dependable

When people know they can count on you to follow through, you'll build a stronger bond.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1995, sportswriter Mitch Albom saw his former college professor, Morrie Schwartz, on TV.

Morrie was dying of ALS. The two hadn't talked in 16 years. So Mitch started visiting every Tuesday, flying from Detroit to Massachusetts each week.



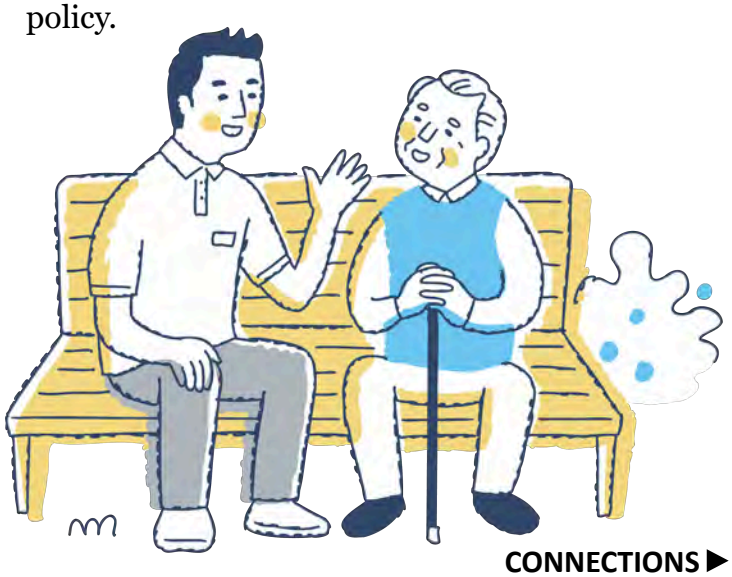
Their talks became the bestselling book *Tuesdays With Morrie*. Mitch first wrote it to help pay Morrie's medical bills.

3 Be honest

In the movie Liar Liar, Jim Carrey plays Fletcher Reede, a lawyer who bends the truth for a living. He also keeps breaking promises to his young son, Max.

So Max makes a birthday wish: For one whole day, his dad can't tell a lie. Chaos follows. But being honest helps Fletcher win back his son's trust.

At home and at work, honesty really is the best policy.



CONNECTIONS ▶

4 Apologize



Stuff happens. You miss a meeting. You can't make it to your kid's soccer game. The company email you sent has typos.

When you make a mistake, own it, and let people know you're sorry.

5 Listen

Oprah Winfrey has interviewed more than 37,000 people.

In a speech at Harvard, she said nearly everyone she interviews asks her some version of the same question when the cameras shut off.



Oprah Winfrey
Photo by: Mack Male, CC BY-SA 2.0.

- Did you hear me?
- Do you see me?
- Did what I say mean anything to you?

Research shows good listening builds trust and stronger relationships, for both the speaker and the listener.[3]

The next time someone is talking to you, put your phone down and listen. Show them the answer is yes.





6 Share a laugh



Laughter brings people together. In 1995, a doctor in Mumbai, India, started a "laughter club" with just five people. At first, they told jokes.

When the jokes ran out, they kept laughing anyway. Today, there are thousands of laughter clubs in more than 100 countries.

Try it at dinner tonight. Clap your hands and chant "ho-ho, ha-ha-ha." See how long everyone lasts before cracking up.

7 Be supportive

When something hard happens to a friend or family member, it's easy to feel helpless. You don't know what to say. You can't fix it. So maybe you say nothing.



But people in a crisis aren't expecting a miracle. They just don't want to feel alone.

Call, text, or send a card. Keep it simple: "I'm so sorry this happened. I'm thinking about you." You don't need perfect words. Knowing someone cares makes a big difference.

CONNECTIONS ▶

Want to Build New Connections?

Making friends as an adult isn't always easy. Here are a few ways to meet new people and strengthen the bonds you already have:

1. 
Invite a co-worker to lunch or take a walk together on your break.

2. 
Join a club, sports league, walking group, or book club.

3. 
Volunteer for a cause you care about.

4. 
Take a class to learn something new.

5. 
Get involved in your neighborhood or faith community.

6. 
Reach out to an old friend you haven't talked to in a while.

7. 
Join an online group for a hobby or interest you love. Then meet up in person later.

8. 
Schedule a regular video call with family or friends who live far away.



Make Connections That Last

Research shows people appreciate hearing from you more than you think, especially when it's a surprise.[4]

So take a page from Mister Rogers. Spend 10 seconds thinking about the people who helped make you who you are. Then call or text one of them today. Or write an old-school letter and drop it in the mail.



More Ways to Make Meaningful Connections

Good connections improve health: https://tinyurl.com/okgjwzg

Be social to live longer: https://tinyurl.com/ycy78z8n

Why connection & kindness matter: https://tinyurl.com/9zpd37rz

References

1. Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. (2023). Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. From: https://tinyurl.com/23227ktj
2. Mineo, L. (2023). Work out daily? OK, but how socially fit are you? Harvard Gazette. From: https://tinyurl.com/3j7cbmt9
3. Kluger, A. N., & Itzchakov, G. (2022). The power of listening at work. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 9:121-146. From: https://tinyurl.com/j43swev3
4. Liu, P., et al. (2023). The surprise of reaching out: Appreciated more than we think. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 124(4): 754-771. From: https://tinyurl.com/bdz2fheh

Make Meaningful Connections

Build social bonds for better health



Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, or add to your digital calendar).
2. Make time to build social bonds and connect with others.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to connect with others.
4. Review your progress at the end of each day, week, and at the end of the month. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	NOTES
HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	
HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	
HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	
HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	
HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	HC ☐ ex. min.___	

_____ Number of days this month I connected with others.
_____ Number of days this month I exercised 30 minutes.

Other wellness projects completed this month:

_____

_____

_____

NAME_____**DATE**_____