myHealth CONNECTIONS
PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ignites Wellness Wednesdays

FEBRUARY, 2025 WEEK 3

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:

Heart-to-Heart Connections

Healthy relationships—whether romantic, platonic or familial, provide emotional support which can reduce stress and improve well-being. That's right, reaching out to others is good for your health. Chronic stress triggers release of cortisol, a hormone that elevates blood pressure and increases inflammation throughout the body.

Whereas, engaging in positive, uplifting conversations, releases oxytocin, the feel-good hormone that lowers stress, promotes relaxation and even strengthens cardiovascular health.

Research indicates that people with strong social connections are less likely to experience heart attacks, high blood pressure and depression. Developing healthy relationships is well-worth the time and energy. Humans are hardwired to need community and compassionate relationships for a myriad of reasons, and all of which benefit mental and physical health.

Building Healthy Bonds

Suggestions for cultivating connections and deepening relationships:

1. Communicate openly by sharing your thoughts and feelings with loved ones and encourage them to reciprocate. Honest communication fosters trust and deepens bonds.
2. Spend quality time with the ones you love. Make space for activities that you and your loved ones enjoy. Shared experiences create lasting memories and strengthen relationships.
3. Show gratitude with a simple "thank you." These two simple words have the power to make others feel seen and valued.

FOLLOW THE MOUSE:
We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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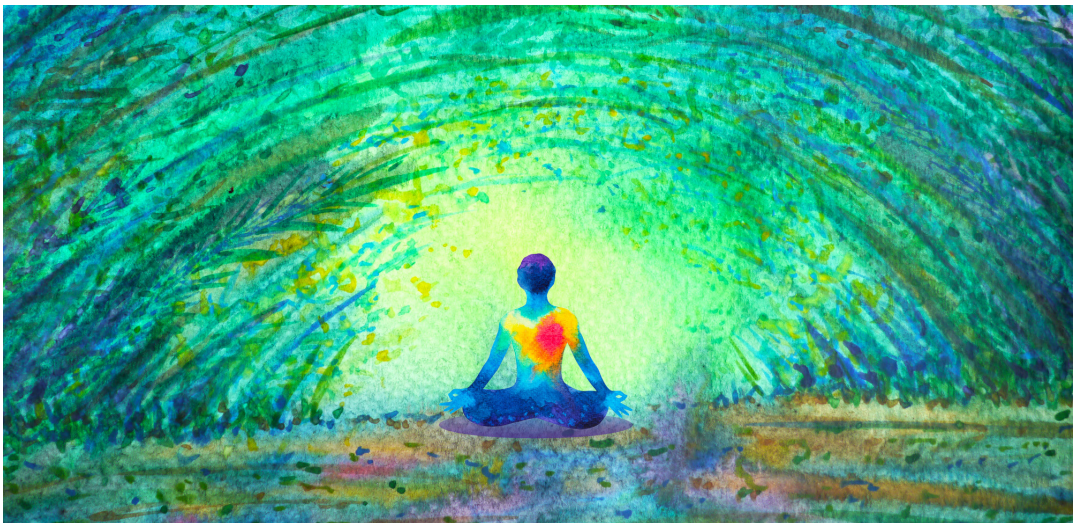
4. Resolve conflicts calmly. Disagreements are part of all relationships. However, it is critically important to manage them with empathy and intentionality. Prioritize reaching a mutual understanding versus the need to be right.
5. Expand your social circle by joining community groups, volunteering, or taking up a new hobby.

EXPERT INSIGHTS ON STRESS REDUCTION

Psychologists and cardiologists alike emphasize the role of social support in reducing stress. They even agree that strong social bonds make us live longer! Having someone to confide in during challenging times can provide perspective and lessen feelings of isolation. Regular interaction with loved ones helps regulate emotions, improves overall mood and reduces the impact stress has on cardiovascular health. Here are some expert-backed tips:



1. Build Your Support Network

Prioritize relationships with the people you trust and with individuals who are supportive and encouraging of you. Whether it's family, friends, colleagues, or support groups, having a network to lean on is vitally important for your health and sense of well-being. Make time for regular check-ins, even if it's just a quick text or call, to strengthen these connections.

2. Practice Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing exercises, such as the **4-7-8 method**, can reduce stress in moments of tension. Inhale for four seconds, hold for seven, and exhale for eight. This simple practice signals your body to shift from a stress response to a relaxed state, calming both mind and body. Share this method with a trusted friend and practice it together to strengthen your bond.

3. Stay Physically Active

Exercise isn't just good for your body—it's a powerful stress reliever. Physical activity boosts endorphin production, improving your mood and helping you manage anxiety. A 20-minute walk can reset your perspective and release built-up tension. Reach out to a health-conscious friend or family member to see if they'd like to join you on your goal of walking daily.

4. Set Boundaries

Learning to say no is a skill that protects your mental well-being. Saying "yes" to everything can lead to burnout and increased stress levels. Prioritize your needs by setting limits on your time and energy and communicate these boundaries clearly and kindly.

5. Schedule Downtime

Carve out time for activities that bring you joy. Whether it's reading, gardening, or simply relaxing with your favorite show, scheduling downtime ensures you have moments to recharge amidst a busy lifestyle.

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH BCBSIL

BCBSIL offers resources to help you prioritize your mental and emotional health. From counseling services to stress-reduction workshops, their tools are designed to support your well-being and help you build healthier relationships. Visit **BCBSIL's Connect Community** to explore programs and strategies tailored to your needs.

Found this week's edition of Wellness Wednesdays to be helpful?

Spread the word to your co-workers so they too can make heart health a priority in 2025.

SOURCES: *American College of Cardiology*, *American Heart Association*, *Mindful.org*