



# SOCIAL CONNECTIONS & RECREATION

Finding other people to relate to and doing things that bring you enjoyment are great ways to improve your mood and overall mental health.

## LONELINESS IS BAD FOR HEALTH

Being lonely can cause the same amount of damage to your lifespan as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is more dangerous to health than obesity.<sup>1</sup>



Loneliness is associated with a higher risk of high blood pressure in older people.<sup>2</sup>

Poor social supports make it harder to recover from mental illnesses, while a strong social support system improves overall outcomes and the ability to bounce back from stress.<sup>3</sup>



Women with breast cancer who have weak support systems before treatment have more pain and symptoms of depression over time.<sup>4</sup>

## SOCIAL INTERACTION AND RECREATION ARE ALL AROUND GOOD FOR YOU

People with strong social relationships are 50% more likely to live longer.<sup>5</sup>



People who do things in nature have better perceptions of their own emotional well-being.<sup>6</sup>

Taking a vacation can help you to feel happier and less stressed for a while. Even short vacations help!<sup>7</sup>



Adolescents who participate in sports have lower odds of suffering from depression or thinking about suicide, likely because sports increase self-esteem and social support.<sup>8</sup>

One study showed that people who participated in leisure activities like reading, playing board games, playing musical instruments, and dancing were



Participating in outdoor recreation decreases symptoms of depression in people with disabilities.<sup>10</sup>

People with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses who participated in MHA's *It's My Life* Social Self Directed Care Program experienced increased quality of life across 12 different measures and a drastic reduction in hospitalization rates.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR CAREGIVERS



Feelings of loneliness and isolation are common among caregivers.<sup>11</sup>



Adult day care and other respite programs can help reduce the demands on caregivers which may improve morale and allow more time for social and recreational activities.<sup>12</sup>

## TIPS FOR FINDING FRIENDS AND THINGS TO DO



Look for rec sports leagues in your community. Softball and kickball are common. You may be able to find other games like bocce ball or shuffleboard as well.

Check meetup.com. The website has groups all over the country that are based around specific activities or interest areas.



Volunteer! Volunteermatch.org has a database of opportunities across a variety of causes, all across the country.

Take a class. Check out your local parks and recreation department or look at national chain stores like Michaels or Home Depot that offer how-to classes.



## SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH #4MIND4BODY

Mental Health America has created a space where people can learn from each other about what they do to stay well.

Tell us how you work fun and friendships into your life by posting with #4mind4body.

We'll collect your Twitter and Instagram posts at [mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body). You can also post directly and anonymously to the site if you would like.

## ARE YOU STRUGGLING?

If you are taking steps to care for your mind, body, and soul but still feel like you are struggling with your mental health, visit [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org) to check your symptoms. It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and help you find tools and resources to feel better.

For a complete list of sources, please visit [bit.ly/4mind4bodySocial](http://bit.ly/4mind4bodySocial).



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## END NOTES:

### SOCIAL CONNECTION AND RECREATION

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