



Key benefits in having good friendships By Andy Holter

Friends lower stress

When we feel close to someone, levels of progesterone increase, a hormone that helps reduce stress and anxiety. When stress levels go down, so does your risk for health conditions like heart disease, obesity, and depression.

Friends can motivate you to be healthier

If you are looking to start a new workout routine or a healthier diet, look at your social circle. You may have more success if your friends employ the healthy habits you are hoping to adopt. When we have close friends who exercise, save money, or volunteer, we are more likely to also engage in those same behaviours.

Friends teach you about yourself

Now might be a good time to think about friendships that are especially meaningful to you. People strive to present themselves as positive and competent and like to talk about their friends, often talking about their current self or the self they would like to become.

Along those same lines, if you realise that a particular relationship does not reflect your values, it's okay to say goodbye. We are often afraid to let go of friendships, perhaps for the nostalgia of the past; the thought that they may be

useful in the future; or how it looks to others when we have fewer friends, but there are times when it is not just okay but helpful for our success and self-identity to let a friendship fade away or break away.

Friends just help you feel better

A lack of friendships and social support increases the risk of developing low moods, anxiety or even depression. One of the key treatments for depression is helping individuals expand their social network and increase the amount of time they are spending with friends. In fact, good friendships predict health and happiness which certainly helps promote good wellbeing.



TRY A SIX-MINUTE DIARY AND MANIFEST YOUR WAY TO HAPPINESS



A simple and effective way to build more gratitude and mindfulness into your daily routine is the six-minute diary method. All you need is to find just three minutes in the morning and three minutes at the end of the day to record what really makes you happy and what you're grateful for, which will bring more of that into your life.

This ties neatly into the 'buzz phrase' of the wellbeing world; 'Manifestation' – a self-help exercise where you focus your thoughts on a desired outcome in order to try to bring it to reality. So, if you're noting down what makes you happy every day, take the next step

and try manifesting to bring more of that into your daily life.

Whilst it may all sound like a load of new age jargon, if you give it a go you might just be surprised by the results. Manifestation is about creating a vision for the future, putting energy and intention into making that vision a reality, and then aligning your thoughts, emotions, and actions accordingly so that your vision can come into fruition...what's the worst that can happen? Give it a try...

Want to find out more? www.self.com/story/does-manifesting-work

'A good friend is like a four-leaf clover: hard to find and lucky to have.' Irish proverb

Developing an Attitude of Gratitude

Gratitude is considered by some as the greatest of all emotions and can have a unique relationship with wellbeing. Gratitude can explain aspects of wellbeing that other personality traits cannot. An *attitude of gratitude* goes hand in hand with mindfulness. A quality of being thankful, readiness to show appreciation for, and to return kindness.

You're grateful when you're aware of what you do have rather than what you don't. The effect of this is an opening of the heart. When you're aware with an open heart, you're in a deeper mindfulness state.

Gratitude is a skill that we can develop. For example, if you are not very good at running or cycling, with practise you can get better; the same is true of gratitude. Through repeated effort you can develop, strengthen and intensify gratitude. To grow your gratitude, we must exercise and practise, which will almost guarantee to make you more grateful, just as you would run better and cycle further...



"Piglet noticed that even though he had a very small heart, it could hold a rather large amount of gratitude."

A A MILNE



How to improve your sense of gratitude

1. Think of something you're not grateful for – perhaps you're not grateful for your car, a relationship or your place of residence.
2. Now think of all the things that are good about it – give yourself two minutes and challenge yourself to come up with as many good things as possible.

For example, if you're not happy with your home, ask yourself: does it give you shelter?, does it give you refuge?, does it give you a place to meet family and friends?; think of the positive aspects which you are grateful for. To supercharge this exercise rather than just thinking about it, write down your answers. Be aware that you may have to overcome some resistance to doing this, especially if you're very ungrateful about a situation.

3. Try this exercise again for other areas of your life – see what effect that has on them. Again, remember that the exercise takes some effort, but the rewards make it worthwhile.
4. Commit to doing this regularly for a week or a month daily basis – you may find yourself being naturally more grateful for all sorts of other things too.

