



THE SOCIAL CURE: RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

If you could take a side-effect-free pill proven to reduce the risk of depression and anxiety, generate a sense of psychological well-being, extend life, reduce perceptions of pain, and strengthen the immune system, would you take it?

I have good news: That “pill” exists. And it’s free and readily available. It’s called: **social connection**.

Because we humans evolved in social packs, we’re hard-wired to need interpersonal relationships and feel a sense of group belonging. In fact, good relationships may be the single most important source of psychological well-being (Peterson, 2006).



PRIORITIZING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

❖ *High-Quality Relationships Are Major Predictors of:*

- Mental health
- Health behavior
- Physical health
- Mortality risk

❖ *How Do Positive Relationships Affect Our Health?*

- Influence our health-related behaviors
- Give social support
- Bolster confidence to face challenges
- Create a sense of responsibility to ourselves and others
- Aid emotion regulation
- Positively impact physiological indicators of health (e.g., immune, endocrine, and cardiovascular functioning)

❖ *Can We Have Too Many Important Relationships?*

- **No. There’s no “threshold” for having sufficient social connection.** Generally, the more the better—so long as our connections are high-quality.
- But bad relationships are major contributors to stress and poor mental and physical health.



THE “SOCIAL CURE” OF GROUP MEMBERSHIPS

❖ *Groups Are as Important as Relationships*

- According to what’s been called “Social Cure” research, belonging to groups that matter to us is just as important to our well-being as interpersonal relationships.
- People with many group memberships have higher well-being than those with few—above and beyond the number of interpersonal relationships they have.

❖ *What Kinds of Groups Generate Social Cure Benefits?*

- **All types of non-work social groups:** Family, community, hobby groups, sports teams, social identity categories (e.g., ethnicity, race, cultural heritage, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, profession, university member), etc.
- **All kinds of work-related groups:** Firm, work group, department, profession, affinity groups, committees, etc.



Our need for relationships to flourish is “among the best-supported hypotheses in the scientific study of well-being”


(Haidt et al., 2008).

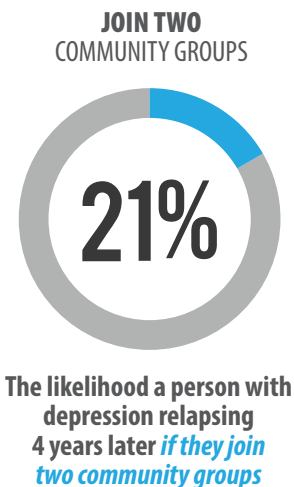
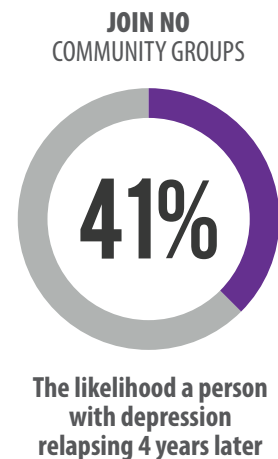
❖ What Are The Health Benefits of Groups?

- Reduced loneliness
- Less depression and anxiety
- Greater confidence and self-esteem
- Higher life satisfaction
- Improved indicators of physical health
- Faster mood recovery and better psychological well-being
- In workplaces, positive job attitudes, less burnout, psychological well-being, and group functioning

❖ What Determines Quality?

Four features are especially important for cultivating meaningful shared identities:

 <p>POSITIVE</p>	<p>We have positive feelings about our groups and find them meaningful. For example, they may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost our self-esteem because we're proud to be members • Contribute to a sense of meaningfulness based on the group's activities, mission, or contribution to a sense of being valued and mattering • Foster a sense of belonging while also enabling individual authenticity • Bolster our self-efficacy or confidence to take on challenges or overcome setbacks
 <p>SUPPORTIVE</p>	<p>Our groups support us in ways important to us—such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional support (e.g., caring, empathy, love, trust), • Instrumental support (e.g., things, services, aid), or • Informational support (problem-solving, appraisal, support for self-evaluation)
 <p>REPRESENTATIVE</p>	<p>We feel like a prototypical member of the group—i.e., that we're similar to other group members in ways that are important to us.</p>
 <p>COMPATIBLE</p>	<p>Our multiple groups are compatible when we're able to harmonize them. They're incompatible when they have contradictory expectations regarding norms, attitudes, values, and behavior.</p>



❖ The More The Merrier

- Whether at work or at home, **groups are good for us.**
- Generally, the more groups we have in our lives, the better our well-being.

❖ Does Quality Matter?

Yes, the quality of our group connections makes a big difference. We can derive “Social Cure” benefits from groups only when we “identify” with them—which means we experience a subjective sense of belonging or a meaningful shared identity.

❖ Can Social Ties Harm Us?

Unfortunately, yes—social ties are not uniformly good.

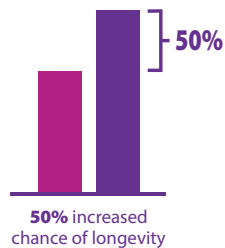
Because social ties are so central to our lives and are not always high-quality, they can be sources of harm. For example, groups memberships can damage our well-being if they:

- Encourage unhealthy norms
- Are incompatible with other group memberships/identities
- Make us feel excluded or unsupported

❖ The Goal: More High-Quality Connections

The goal is to improve the quality of our group memberships and relationships and develop social connections that we find meaningful and valuable—not just increase the number of social contacts/group memberships for their own sake.

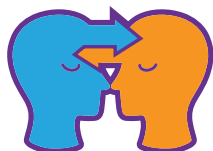
THE BENEFITS OF HIGH SOCIAL CONNECTION:



Affects **gene expression** in ways that **aid immunity** and **mental health**



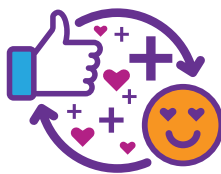
Lower rates of **anxiety** and **depression**



Higher **self-esteem** and **empathy**



Better **emotion** regulation skills



Social connection creates a **positive feedback loop** of **social, emotional,** and **physical well being**



Most common response to what **gives life meaning**



Reduced perception of **physical pain**



Hill to be climbed **perceived as less steep** in the presence of a friend



Reduced **workplace burnout**



Bolsters confidence to face challenges and overcome setbacks



Social connection creates a **positive feedback loop** of **social, emotional,** and **physical well being**



THE DANGERS OF LOW SOCIAL CONNECTION:



Worse for health than smoking, high blood pressure, or obesity



Higher inflammation at the **cellular level**



Higher susceptibility to **anxiety** and **depression**



Slower recovery from disease



Increased **antisocial behavior** and **violence**



Reduced **immune response**

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