



# Building Relationships Improves Your Well-Being

Maintaining social connections is essential for good mental health. When we have interactions and supportive relationships with others, we feel a sense of belonging and have people we can rely on during tough times. Social connections can also reduce stress and improve our overall well-being by providing opportunities for relaxation and enjoyment. In addition to these mental health benefits, research has shown that strong social connections can also have physical health benefits, such as lower rates of heart disease and other chronic illnesses.

After more than two years of pandemic-related isolation, many of us are eager to get back to more “normal” social interaction, and 2023 is the year for it! As we make our plans for 2023, it’s important to be mindful of the relationships we cultivate, and to be proactive in planning social interaction and surrounding ourselves with supportive, positive people.

*Here are 12 ways you can build social connections in 2023:*

## Take a class or workshop on an interesting subject

Most community colleges offer (non-credit) courses to the public, as well as local libraries, community centers, and even retail store chains (craft stores, sporting stores, cooking stores, etc.)

## Volunteer with a local charity or non-profit organization

This can be a great way to give back to your community while connecting with others—along with the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping people, animals, or needs within your area.

## Attend local community events, celebrations, or festivals

These events often bring people from all walks of life together and can be a great opportunity to meet people of differing ages and backgrounds.

## Join a rec league, sports team, gym, or fitness class

You’ll improve your fitness level and ward off weight gain while meeting others who are focused on staying active and healthy.

## Host a dinner party or game night at your home

Start with a couple of friends, neighbors, or co-workers and challenge them to each take a turn hosting, so that you have an ongoing event to look forward to together. Invite friends and encourage them to bring along a few of their own friends to expand your social circle.

## Participate in a Bible study or faith-based group

Connect with like-minded individuals and build relationships based on shared values and beliefs.

## Join a book club or discussion group

Not only will you meet people who share your love of reading and engaging in thoughtful discussions, but you will discover new authors and genres to explore.

## Reach out to old friends or family members that you haven’t seen in a while.

Reconnecting with people from your past can be a great way to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones.

## Attend a local theater production or concert

From professional performances, to local theater groups, colleges and University theater departments, and even local high school drama clubs... there are more local productions to choose from than you could likely attend!

## Join a study group at your local University, library, or community center

This can be a great way to meet new people and engage in intellectual discussions.

## Participate in online communities or forums related to your hobbies or interests

One benefit of online communities is the ability to connect without the need for transportation or physical proximity, opening a much broader range of possibilities.

## Consider joining a group or hobby club

Join one related to an activity that you’ve always wanted to try or around a skill you want to build. This can be a great way to meet new people and try something new at the same time.



## Get Potluck Dinner & Party-Ready with these Easy Recipes!

Homemade dressings are easy to make and really do "crown" simple recipes. As you plan out social events for yourself and friends, here is one of our favorite easy-to-make recipes that can be made quickly, inexpensively, and appropriate for most events.



### Lime Cumin Dressing

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon honey
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- In a small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lime juice, cumin, honey, salt, and pepper.
- Taste and adjust the seasoning as needed. If the dressing is too tart, add a little more honey. If it's too thick, add a little more oil.
- Use the dressing immediately, or store it in the refrigerator until ready to use. It will keep in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.
- This dressing would be great on a black bean and corn salad, or any other type of salad that would benefit from a tangy, zesty flavor. Enjoy!



### Grilled Vegetable & Quinoa Salad

This recipe is easy to transport and can be served at room temperature. Simply grill a variety of vegetables (such as zucchini, bell peppers, and eggplant), and toss them with cooked quinoa, feta cheese, and a vinaigrette dressing.



### Black Bean & Corn Salad

This refreshing salad is a crowd-pleaser, and it's easy to make in advance. Simply combine canned black beans, corn, diced red onion, diced bell pepper, and chopped cilantro in a large bowl. Add a homemade lime-cumin dressing (at left), and toss to coat.

