

HABIT 9: FAMILY & FRIENDS

Time spent
with family
and friends
is precious
and free.



Goal: Invest your time in those people who matter most to you.

Having close friends and family has far-reaching benefits for your health. A strong social support network can be critical to help you through the stress of tough times, whether you've had a bad day at work or a year filled with loss or chronic illness. Spending time with people helps ward off loneliness, gives you a sense of belonging, and increases your sense of self-worth. Family and friends can also encourage you to change or avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits.

Many social activities and celebrations which bring our family and friends together revolve around food. Having a seated family dinner can have many benefits, but family gatherings or social activities with friends can turn to less than optimal health behaviors quickly. Consider the following suggestions to help you build relationships without sacrificing your personal health.

Social Gatherings. Take time to reflect and focus on relationships with those you're gathering with, and less on the food, planning, or gifts. Incorporate healthy foods into your celebrations, or [make ingredient substitutions](#) to give your meals a healthy boost, and take time to savor the foods. Check [here](#) for more ideas on how to make celebrations fun, healthy, and active.

Be Active. Gather your family and friends and be active together. Attend community events or races, volunteer and give back to others, go for a walk, or meet up at a park. Find opportunities to

spend time outdoors and in nature with those you care about and it will be even more special. Not only will you get some physical activity, but you'll have a new shared experience and build positive memories.

Nurture your relationships. [Maintaining healthy friendships](#) requires a little give and take. Try to respect your friends' boundaries, don't compete, and avoid relentless complaining as this can put a strain on your friendships. Adopt a positive outlook, take a genuine interest in what's going on in your friends' lives, and don't judge. Give your friends space to change, grow and make mistakes, and keep confidential any personal information that your friends share. Investing time in making friends and strengthening your friendships can pay off in better health.

Keep it positive. Watch for situations that seem to drain your energy. For example, avoid spending too much time with someone who is constantly negative and critical. Steer clear of people involved in unhealthy behaviors, such as alcohol or substance abuse, especially if you've struggled with addictions.

Final thoughts. Research indicates that people who have a terminal illness or are dying often note that they wished they hadn't worked so hard, but rather spent their time with family and friends. Time spent with family and friends is precious and free. Don't put relationships on the back burner, but rather make them a priority.