

EXTENSION UPDATE

Release Date: Immediate

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IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO MAKE FRIENDS

Friends are important throughout our lives. A friend can listen to you, share in your joys and concerns. A friend can provide companionship. A friend can go to the ball game or movies with you. Friends can also help out in a pinch, help put up fence, or go to the doctor with you. Friends add joy to our life!

People need to realize how critical it is to continue to form friendships as we grow older. Much of the loneliness and isolation older people feel is a result of the loss of lifelong friends and loved ones who have died or moved away.

Studies have found that people with friends are more optimistic and have better mental health. At a time when family members may not live in the same community as their older relatives, friends are especially important because they watch over and help one another.

As when they were younger, older men and women relate to their friends in different ways. Men are more likely to share activities or sports events together, while women are more interested in conversation and sharing their experiences.

Studies reveal that men and women, who were active and had a large circle of friends in middle age, were more likely to seek out new friends as they got older. They were less likely to depend solely on their families for companionship and emotional support. This makes it especially important to encourage older relatives to stay active in their communities.

You've heard of the saying "reach out and touch someone." This applies to each one of us as we get older. It's critical to our health and our happiness.

Here are some ideas of places to meet potential friends:

Go to the fitness center. Not every workout experience has to be a solo event. If you join a class or group activity, you have the opportunity to visit with people who have the same interests as you.

Join a club. There are plenty of listings in local papers under the ‘community’ section or contact the local chamber of commerce for a list of clubs. If you enjoy gardening, join a gardening club. If you like quilting, join a quilt club.

A local church may be the ideal place to meet someone who shares a similar spiritual interest. Most religious organizations have social activities. Make it a point to participate in a few.

Attend a class at a local community college or university. Not only will you learn more about a subject you are interested in, you may find a friend who is like minded.

Volunteer for a local organization. Become a 4-H leader, a Master Gardener volunteer, a study buddy. You can move out of your own comfort zone and help others learn and grow, plus meet new people in the process.

Be involved and active in your community, so you can continue to meet new people and form new friendships. Remember the saying, “Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver, the other gold.”

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