

Mental Health Awareness Month:

Our Epidemic of Loneliness & Isolation

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation



2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the
Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community



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Social Connection Terms



Belonging

A fundamental human need—the feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experience.



Social Connectedness

The degree to which any individual or population might fall along the continuum of achieving social connection needs.



Social Support

The perceived or actual availability of informational, tangible, and emotional resources from others, commonly one's social network.

Social Isolation & Loneliness Terms



Loneliness

A subjective distressing experience that results from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connections, where inadequate refers to the discrepancy or unmet need between an individual's preferred and actual experience.



Social Isolation

Objectively having few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction.

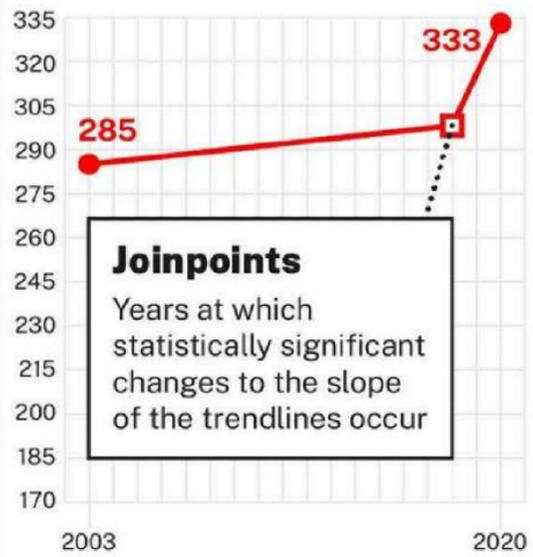


Solitude

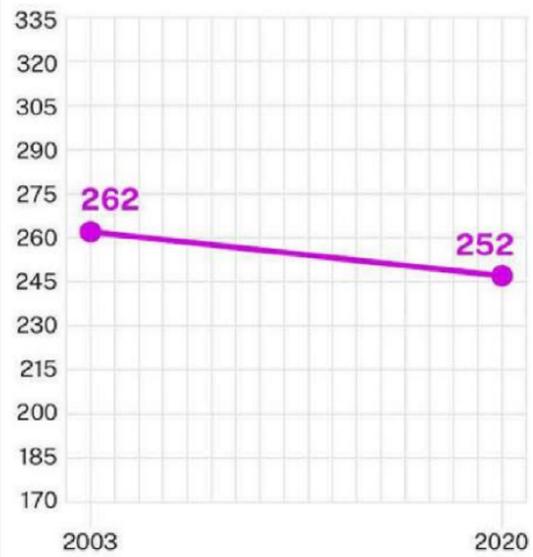
A state of aloneness by choice that does not involve feeling lonely.



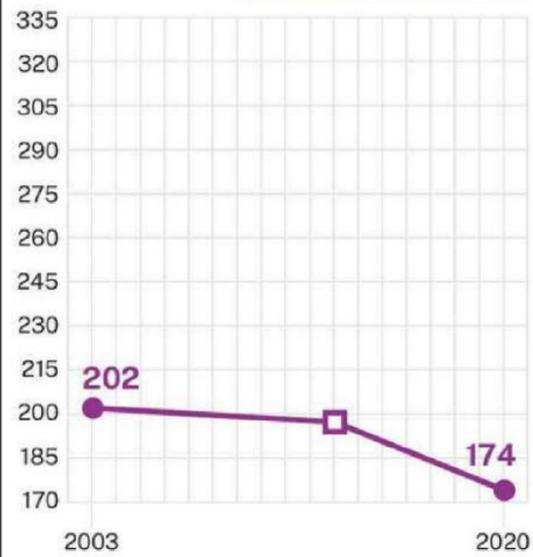
ANNUAL DAILY AVERAGE IN MINUTES



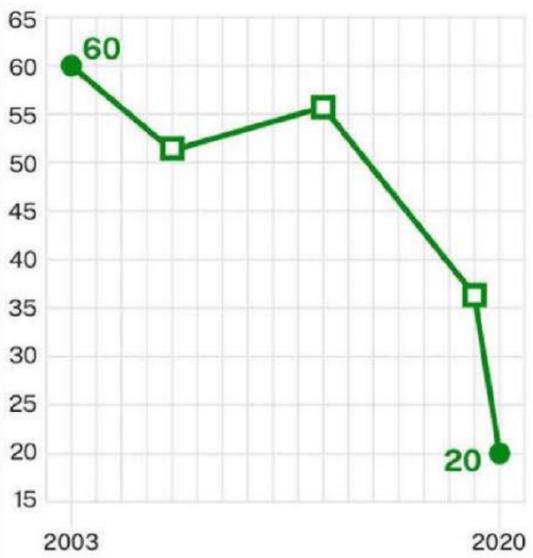
Social Isolation
an increase of **24 hours** per month



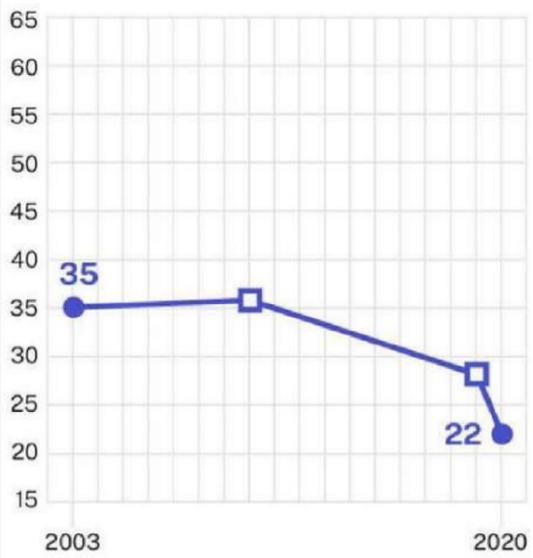
Household Family Social Engagement
a decrease of **5 hours** per month



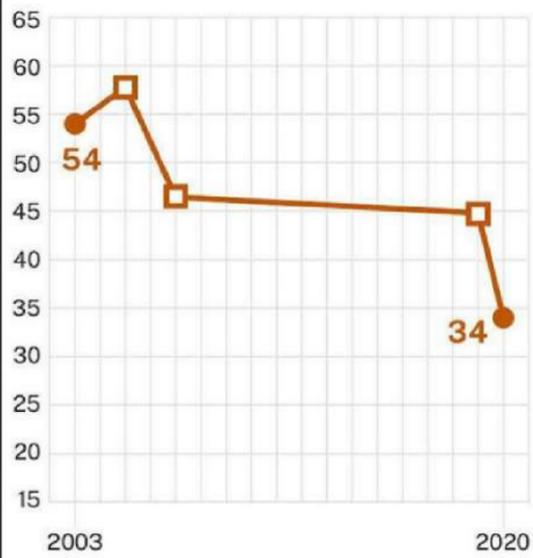
Companionship
a decrease of **14 hours** per month
Companionship refers to shared leisure for the sake of enjoyment and intrinsic satisfaction



Social Engagement with Friends
a decrease of **20 hours** per month



Non-Household Family Social Engagement
a decrease of **6.5 hours** per month



Social Engagement with Others
a decrease of **10 hours** per month

YEAR

Current Trends: Is Social Connection Declining?

Note as social networks are getting smaller, and levels of social participation are declining distinct from whether individuals report that they are lonely.

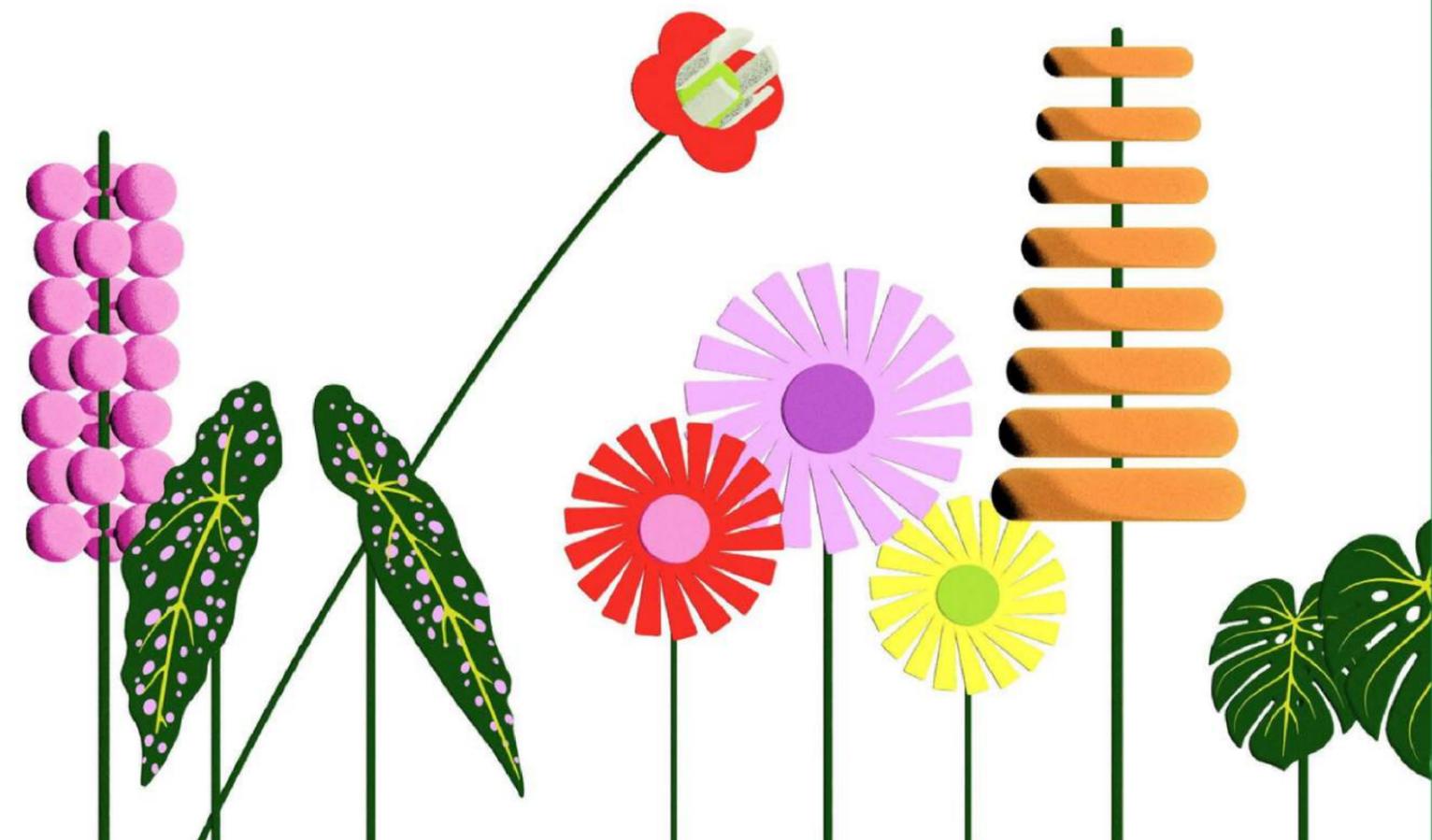
Awareness can help you consider these impacts and cultivate ways to foster sufficient social connection outside of chosen traditional means and structures.

From 2003 to 2020, time spent alone increased, while time spent on in-person social engagement decreased.

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation:
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Effects of Social Connection and Community

Social Connection Fact Cards

2023



Let's talk 
about why
social
connection
matters.

Social Connection Statistics

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Being more socially connected can improve stress responses and minimize the negative health effects of stress.^{1,2}

1. [Cohen & Willis, 1985.](#)
2. [Southwick, et al., 2016.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



People with strong perceptions of community belongingness are 2.6 times more likely to report good or excellent health than people with a low sense of belongingness.¹

1. [My Health My Community, 2018.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Children and adolescents who enjoy positive relationships with their peers, parents, and teachers experience improved academic outcomes.¹

1. [DuBoid et al., 2011.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Social isolation, or even the perception of isolation, can increase inflammation in the body to the same degree as physical inactivity.¹

1. [Yang et al., 2016.](#)

Social Connection Stats, Cont.

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Living in isolation reduces our chances of survival and social isolation increases the risk for premature mortality by 29%.¹

1. [Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Poor social relationships, social isolation, and loneliness can increase your risk of heart disease by 29% and risk of stroke by 32%.¹

1. [Valtorta et al., 2016.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Smaller social network size is associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and of other diabetic complications including heart attacks and kidney disease.^{1, 2}

1. [Brinkhues et al., 2017.](#)
2. [Brinkhues et al., 2018.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Among older adults, chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50%.¹

1. [Lazzari & Rabottini, 2021.](#)

Social Connection Stats, Cont.

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Adults who report feeling lonely often are more than twice as likely to develop depression as adults who report rarely or never feeling lonely.¹

1. [Mann et al., 2022.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Social support from friends and family is associated with improved hypertension and diabetes management.^{1,2,3,4}

1. [Magrin et al., 2017.](#)
2. [Shahin et al., 2021.](#)
3. [Pan et al., 2021.](#)
4. [Song et al., 2017.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD



Immersion in local community-based activities such as volunteering significantly increases the likelihood of unemployed individuals becoming employed.^{1,2,3}

1. [Wilson, 2000.](#)
2. [Jastrzab et al., 2004.](#)
3. [Spera et al., 2015.](#)

SOCIAL CONNECTION FACT CARD

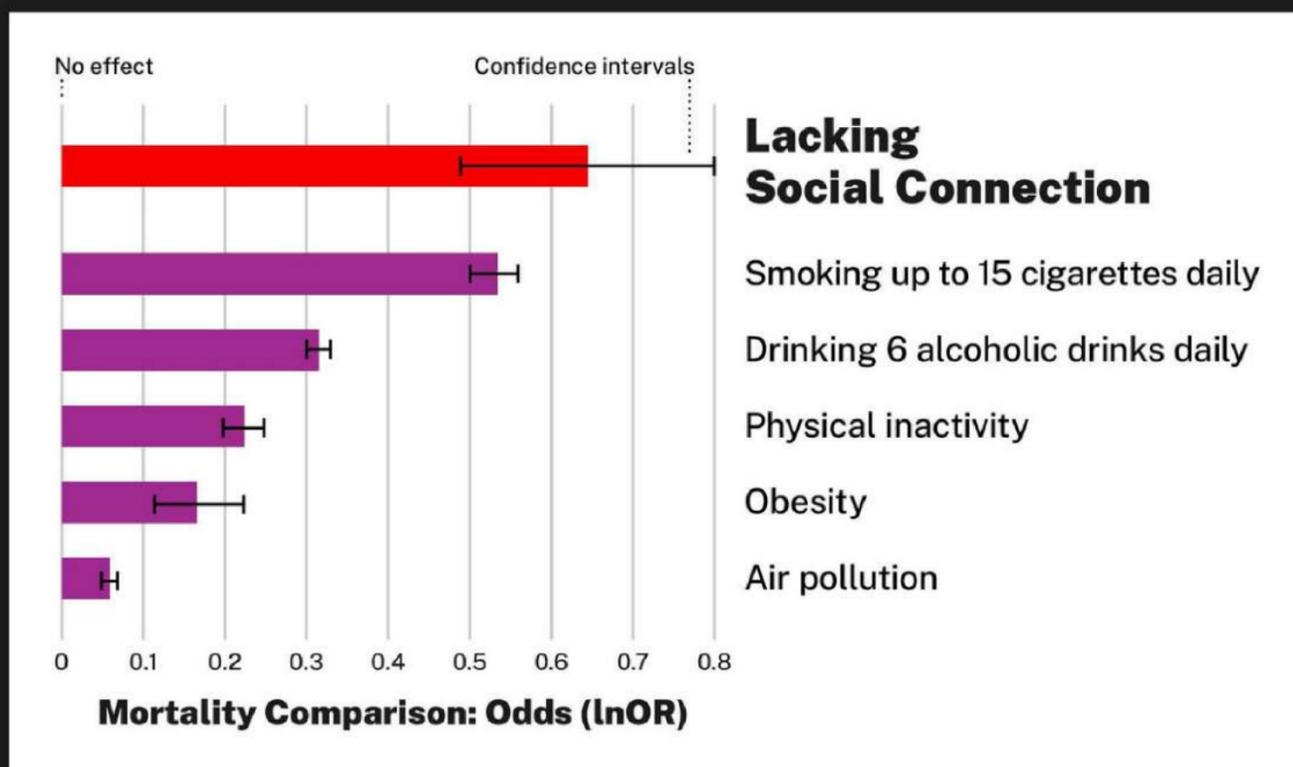


Loneliness and poor social support have been found to significantly contribute to the development and severity of illnesses after exposure to viruses.^{1,2}

1. [Cohen, 2020.](#)
2. [LeRoy et al., 2017.](#)

Effects of Social Connection, Isolation, and Loneliness on Morality

Lacking social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.



50%

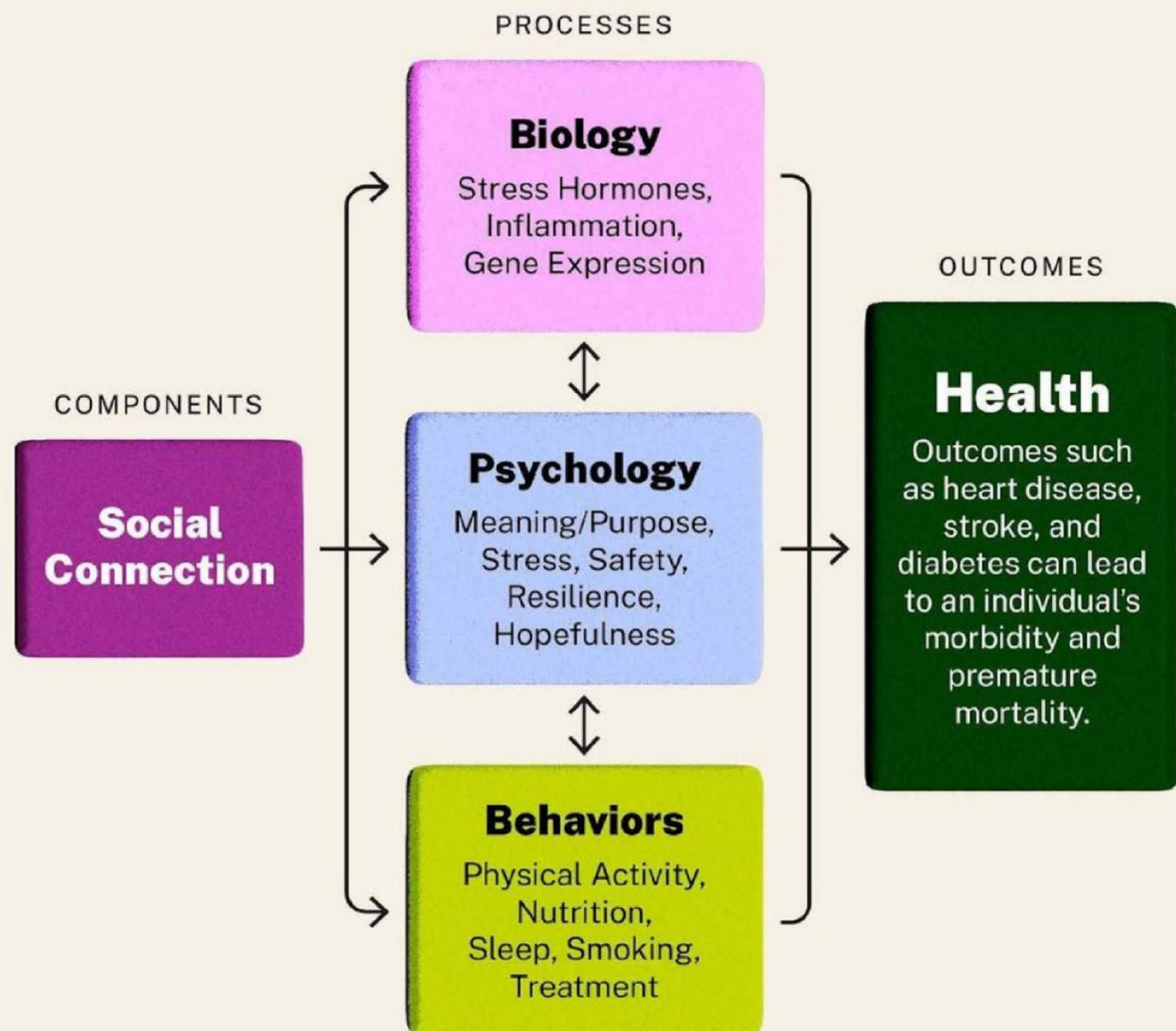
Data across 148 studies, with an average of 7.5 years of follow-up, suggest **that social connection** increases the odds of survival by 50%!

Comparison groups: Complex measures of social integration: high v. low; not smoking v. smoking < 15 cigarettes daily; alcohol abstinence v. drinking > 6 alcoholic drinks daily; physical activity v. inactivity; low BMI v. high BMI; low air pollution v. high air pollution.

Source: Holt-Lunstad J, Robles TF, Sbarra DA. Advancing Social Connection as a Public Health Priority in the United States. *American Psychology*. 2017;72(6):517-530. doi:10.1037/amp0000103. This graph is a visual approximation.

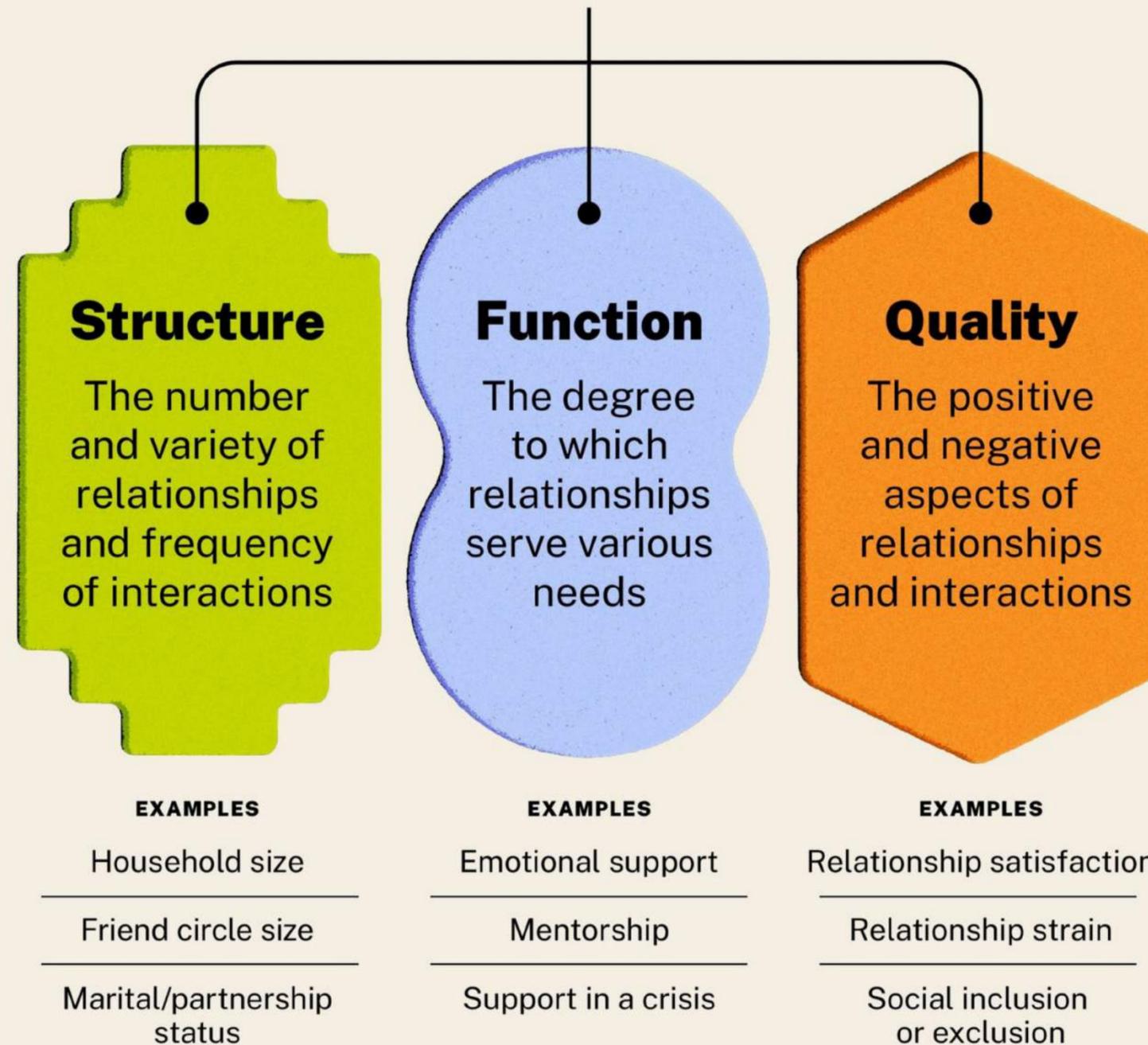
How Does Social Connection Influence Health?

Social connection influences health through **three principal pathways**: biology, psychology, and behavior.



Three Components of Social Connection

The extent to which an individual is socially connected depends on multiple factors, including:



Source: Holt-Lunstad J. Why Social Relationships Are Important for Physical Health: A Systems Approach to Understanding and Modifying Risk and Protection. *Annu Rev Psychol.* 2018;69:437-458.

So, What Can You Do?



1. Participate in social and community groups
2. Actively engage with people of different backgrounds and experiences
3. Be responsive, supportive, and practice gratitude

4. Understand the power of social connection and the consequences of social disconnection
5. Seek out opportunities to serve and support others
6. Minimize distraction during conversation



7. Invest time in nurturing your relationships
8. Seek help during times of struggle
9. Reduce practices that lead to feelings of disconnection from others

10. Be open with your health care provider
11. Make time for civic engagement
12. Reflect the core values of connection

Key Takeaways

“Each of us can start now, in our own lives, by strengthening our connections and relationships.”

—Dr. Vivek Murthy
US Surgeon General

Humans are wired for social connection, but we’ve become more isolated over time

Social connection is as essential to our long-term survival as food and water. But today, loneliness is more widespread than other major health issues in the U.S. Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation is a major public health concern.

Social connection significantly improves the health and well-being of all individuals

Social connection reduces the risk of premature mortality. It can predict better physical and mental health outcomes and ease stress. Higher levels of connection can influence health-related behaviors. Educational and economic achievement are even impacted by connection.

Social connection is vital to community health and success

Socially connected communities enjoy better population-level health. They are more prepared for — and resilient in the face — of disaster situations. They also experience greater economic prosperity and reduced levels of crime and violence.

Together, we can advance social connection and improve our nation’s public health

Fostering social connection requires that we each commit to our relationships and communities. Our actions today can create sustainable changes to society and bring better health to all.