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Support Groups and Social Support

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Overview

When you're dealing with everyday problems, stress, or health issues, it's important to have people in your life who can give you support. You may need a shoulder to cry on or someone to talk to. It's also important to have social support when you're dealing with major life events or managing a serious health condition.

There are a lot of ways you can find social support. You can get support from family and friends, from groups led by professionals, and from groups of others who have similar problems.

If you're feeling alone, having a support network can help. Your network can help you learn new ways to deal with your problems and stay motivated to overcome them.

Social support includes emotional support such as love, trust, and understanding, as well as advice and concrete help, such as help managing your time. Your family, friends, and community all can do this. They can make you feel cared about and feel good about yourself, and can give you hope.

How can you get social support?

You may get your social support from many people. You may play sports with one group of people, go to movies with another, and turn to family or friends to talk over problems.

You can look for support from:

- Your spouse or partner and your adult children.
- Your parents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, grandparents, and anyone who is like family to you.
- Friends, co-workers, members of your religious and/or spiritual groups, neighbours, and classmates.
- Support groups, consumer drop-in centres, and online support groups.
- Doctors, therapists, nurses, and other professionals.

Ask yourself where you get your social support. You may be able to forge a closer relationship with family members or friends. Maybe you know someone who you'd like to know better. You can join a club, or find a group of people with the same interests you have.

How can you strengthen your social support?

Improving your social support can help you deal with problems such as health issues. Here are some ways you can make your social support stronger.

- Know that social support is a two-way street.
You count on your social network for support, but its members also count on you. Ask them about their families, jobs, and interests, and help them when you can.
- Know your friends' limits.
You don't have to see or call your friends every day. If you're going through a rough patch, ask friends if it's okay to contact them outside of the usual boundaries.
- Don't always complain or talk about yourself.
Know when it's time to stop talking and listen or to just enjoy your friend's company.
- Be clear when communicating.
Ask questions to be sure you know what people want. If you ask for something, be sure you make yourself understood. Listen to what your friends have to say, and don't judge them.
- Know that good friends can be bad friends.
If your buddy keeps you drinking when you shouldn't be, you may want to end the friendship. A social network lifts you up. It shouldn't drag you down.

What are self-help and support groups?

Self-help and support groups can be very helpful for some people. These groups usually consist of people with similar problems who meet to give support, practical advice, and encouragement to the people who participate in the group.

Self-help and support groups are different from counselling sessions. These groups may last for only a few sessions or they may be ongoing.

Self-help and support groups:

- Are run by members of the group. Group members help each other solve problems.
- Meet regularly, usually once a week. Some groups may meet only as needed.
- Can be attended by both the person who has the condition and his or her family and friends. Membership may vary. Talk with someone in the group before attending for the first time.
- Usually work best if all members participate. It is not important to talk in the group, especially if it is your first time. Listening (and offering silent encouragement by smiling and paying attention) is also a way of taking part.

Joining a self-help or support group does not take the place of counselling. Some people who attend these groups also need to participate in regular counselling sessions with a health professional.

How can you find a support group?

Finding a support group that works for you may take time. There are many options. Some groups have a group leader who helps lead discussions or shares information. Others are less formal. Some meet in person, while others meet online.

Try using these resources to help you find the best support group for you.

- Your doctor, health care team, or counsellor.
- People with the same health concern.
- Your local church, mosque, synagogue, or other religious group.
- A city, provincial, or national group that provides support for your health concern. Check your local library or community centre for a list of these groups. Or look for information online.
- Your local community, friends, and family.

Related Information

- [Grief and Grieving](#)
- [Importance of Personal Relationships for Lowering Stress](#)

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Author: [Healthwise Staff](#)

Medical Review: Adam Husney MD - Family Medicine & Christine R. Maldonado PhD - Behavioral Health & Kathleen Romito MD - Family Medicine



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