

Social Connectedness

By Dr. Margaret Rea

This time of year marks the beginning of the journey for our incoming students and the reentry for our existing students. Oh and yes, the continued push for those who have unfortunately not had a break. It is an important time of year to review strategies that promote resiliency and well-being. This issue will address one key element of wellness - social connectedness.

Social connectedness is the degree to which we identify that we have sufficient and diverse relationships that offer such elements as emotional support, information, logistical help and even material aid. There is an abundance of literature that discusses the positive impact of social support and connections on physical and emotional health and overall resiliency of individuals at all stages of life. Social support has been associated with immune response, cancer recurrence and blood pressure. Social connectedness is related to decreases in depression and anxiety and can lessen the impact of stress and trauma.

There is a great deal of focus on the important role of social connectedness for older adults suggesting that social connections positively impact the aging process, while a recent study of homeless youth found that social connectedness was a buffer to developing severe mental health outcomes. Feeling connected to a community promotes a feeling of security and trust and in turn individuals are more likely to engage in health promoting activities. "<http://www.cultureofhealth.org/en/taking-action/making-health-a-shared-value/sense-of-community.html>

Connectedness goes hand in hand with the feeling of belonging. Spending time with others who share your experiences, interest and values can help promote a rich community. While at the same time, reaching out to those with a different background or culture can enrich you and broaden your sense of connectedness. Belonging does not mean working to make yourself fit into a group. Instead, belonging is bringing your authentic self to a group. Social support is reciprocal; we can connect with others by offering care as well as by receiving it. Volunteering to help an individual or a group can be a sure way to feel connected to others. Being important to others builds a sense of belonging.

Consider building social connectedness as you face the stress of the new academic year. Some of you might tend to isolate in an effort to focus on academics. Please be mindful that going underground into the social isolation bubble can work against your well-being. Reach out to individuals for a coffee date, set up a study group, join a student interest group or volunteer at one of the free clinics. Keep in mind that most of us need a circle of support and that the individuals within the circle provide varied element whether it is emotional, financial, or intellectual support. One member of your circle might offer logistical support by simply offering to carpool, another is a great listener, while another has your same schedule and can meet for lunch or a study session. Consider that your support circle can include family, staff and faculty. If you draw a circle on a piece of paper and begin filling in names of individuals and groups with whom you have a connection, you can foster the experience of belonging and in turn your resiliency.



Wellness Events

UC Davis Health Farmers Market
Ed Bldg Outdoor Quad
Thursday 3 to 7:30 p.m.

Living Fit Forever Classes
http://intranet.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/clinops/resources/living_fit_forever.shtml

Work Life and Wellness Events
ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/hr/wellness/brownbags.html

UCDMC Yoga
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Gz23GMJbZJDI-wzn9g8NxUnia4IFuVshah4olav7Ow0/edit#>

Artful Meditation at the Crocker
<http://intranet.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/publish/insidernews/ucdhs/12108>

How To Meditate to Connect

Sharon Salzberg's discussion of a loving kindness meditation that promotes social connection fit with the theme of the newsletter:

"It's easy to feel separate from other people and forms of life. When experiencing the world dualistically, there's a pervasive sense of "us" and "them," or "self" and "other." But no matter our belief system, actions, or status, we are all joined together in this world through strands of relationship and interconnection. By practicing loving-kindness meditation, you can learn to see the lives of others as related to your own. This doesn't mean you must like everybody, or agree with everything they do. It means you can open up to the possibility of caring for others not just because you like them, admire them, or are indebted to them, but because your lives are inextricably linked.

Use this practice to recover your innermost knowledge of that linkage, dissolve barriers you have been upholding, and genuinely awaken to how connected we all are."

1. Begin with someone who has helped you; maybe they've been directly generous or kind, or have inspired you though you've never met them. When you think of them, they make you smile.

Bring an image of the person to mind, or feel their presence as if they're right in front of you. Say their name to yourself, and silently offer these phrases to them, focusing on one phrase at a time.

- May you live in safety.

- May you have mental happiness (peace, joy).
- May you have physical happiness (health, freedom from pain).
- May you live with ease.

Don't struggle to fabricate a feeling or sentiment. If your mind wanders, simply begin again.

2. After a few minutes, move on to a friend. Start with a friend who's doing well right now, then switch to someone who is experiencing difficulty, loss, pain, or unhappiness.

3. Offer loving-kindness to a neutral person, who you don't feel a strong liking or disliking for: a cashier at the supermarket, a bank teller, a dry cleaner. When you offer loving-kindness to a neutral person, you are offering it to them simply because they exist—you are not indebted to or challenged by them.



4. Offer loving-kindness toward a person with whom you have difficulty. Start with someone mildly difficult, and slowly work toward someone who has hurt you more grievously.

It's common to feel resentment and anger, and it's important not to judge yourself for that. Rather, recognize that anger burns within your heart and causes suffering, so out of the greatest respect and compassion for yourself, practice letting go and offering loving-kindness.

5. Finish by offering loving-kindness to anyone who comes to mind—people, animals, those whom you like, those whom you don't, in an adventurous expanse of your own power of kindness.

https://www.mindful.org/sharon-salzberg-connect-with-kindness/?utm_source=Mindful+Newsletter&utm_campaign=ea840864ef-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_06_26&utm_

Monthly Recipe: Spicy Peanut Tofu Lettuce Wrap

Dr. Oliveira from the UC Davis Department of Integrative Medicine has been researching areas of the world where people live into their 100s. She refers to these locations as the Blue Zones: Okinawa, Loma Linda, Nicoya, Sardinia, and Ikaria. It appears that one of the secrets to the longevity is a plant-based diet. Dr. Oliveira has been sharing some of the recipes from those areas such as the

"It's time to take your classic lettuce wrap to the next level! This mouth-watering, plant-based recipe starts with tofu then blends the nuttiness of chopped peanuts and almond butter with the kick of chili garlic sauce, soy

sauce and green onions. With an amazing flavor profile, this is sure to become a lunchtime favorite."

<http://ucdintegrativemedicine.com/recipes/spicy-peanut-tofu-lettuce-wrap/#gs.wTP045o>



Wellness App: What's Up

This App helps you monitor how you are feeling during the day. It highlights several negative thinking patterns and methods to overcome them as well as includes a way to track your thinking so you can identify patterns that you might want to address and challenge. The app also includes grounding exercises that you can use at times when stress is feeling overwhelming and three useful breathing exercises to help with relaxation.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/whats-up-a-mental-health-app/id968251160?mt=8>