

Connecting for better health

Improving wellbeing for people with diabetes through social connection



Latest research shows staying socially connected can help reduce the risk of developing diabetes and improve outcomes for people living with the condition. But what does that mean in practice?

First, let's define social connection and disconnection.

Social connection means having enough high-quality relationships with other people and generally being happy with the quality of these relationships.

Conversely, **social disconnection** means not having enough high-quality relationships or being unhappy with the quality of these relationships.

Social disconnection is a risk factor for diabetes.

Social connection means having enough relationships with other people and being generally happy with the quality of these relationships. Social disconnection is not having enough of these quality relationships and is a significant risk factor for diabetes.

Research shows people who are socially disconnected are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes over time than those with satisfying social lives. People who are socially isolated are also at greater risk of complications related to diabetes. For example, people with diabetes who report being socially disconnected may experience greater physical decline

over time than those who feel socially connected, leading to a loss of independence. Social disconnection has been linked with heart disease and poorer blood glucose management in people with diabetes.

Diabetes is a risk factor for social disconnection.

We know that social disconnection is a risk factor for diabetes, but the opposite may also be true. New research suggests that being diagnosed with diabetes can lead to people becoming disconnected from their friends and family. People with diabetes whose symptoms worsen over time – particularly those who experience physical challenges or reduced mobility - are more likely to withdraw socially than those whose symptoms are being managed.

What should I do?

Connecting is about building positive relationships with the people around us including family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and our local community. Joining a local community group, a sports club or a special interest group in person or online can be a good place to start. Taking part in an activity that has meaning for you makes talking to other people easier and is a good way to share interests.

The local newspaper or community centre will have information about what's going on in your area. You can also try volunteering, which is a great way to meet new people and do something that makes you feel good. Keeping intergenerational relationships strong – for example by playing with your grandchildren or attending an intergenerational play group – is also a good way to stay connected.

Look into social prescribing programs.

Social prescribing involves someone working with you and linking you to local social activities that you enjoy. It involves uniting health and social care to focus on the wellbeing of the whole person, not just their physical health.

There are many social prescribing programs available, like Connect Local (www.connectlocal.org.au) currently operating for people aged 65+ in Glen Eira, Melbourne), that work by tapping into local supports, services, and activities to bolster social connection for individuals who want to connect with others.

See what's going on in your neighbourhood.

Reach out to your local neighbourhood to establish new connections! For example, you might see what's on at your local Neighbourhood House (Home | Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association). Another idea might be to try out going to a Chatty Café ([Chatty Café](#) which run both in-person and online).

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