

Be Connected:

Ways to Stay Engaged as You Age

Staying socially connected is as important to a healthy lifestyle as nutrition and exercise. Research suggests that regular social interaction can positively impact physical and mental health and slow cognitive decline¹. Attending weekly social events supports your healthy aging², and, giving your time and talents to an organization offers you a chance to help others. By getting involved in your community and sharing your skills and experience, you increase your community's social capital to everyone's benefit.

Here are some simple steps you can follow to add connection opportunities into your life.

Step 1: What are your interests?

Overwhelmed by the choices of how to engage with your community? Answer these questions to help you determine what draws your attention:

- What have you always wanted to do?
- What do you want to learn?
- What inspires you?
- What issues are important to you?

Step 2: What stands in your way?

- **Transportation:** If public transportation isn't an option, consider contacting a volunteer driver program in your area. [To find a local program visit https://ctaa.org/about-nvtc/](https://ctaa.org/about-nvtc/) or contact 211 Texas by dialing 211 or visiting <https://www.211texas.org/>.
- **Mobility:** From lifelong learning classes to yoga, there's a hobby or group for people of all abilities. Research what options are available through local community and senior centers and enlist a friend to provide support.
- **Financial concerns:** Many local community centers and libraries offer free or low-cost activities. Make a list and try a couple of new things each month. If the activity isn't a good fit, move on to the next one.

Step 3: Ready to try something new?

Staying socially engaged begins with your everyday habits. Regularly challenge yourself with small steps to increase your social connections.

- Say "hi" to your neighbors or get involved in a neighborhood organization.
- Create and maintain a regular schedule of calling, emailing or messaging friends and family.
- Consider involving yourself in a local community group or faith center.

¹ Shankar, A., Hamer, H., McMunn, A., Steptoe, A. P. A. (2013) 'Social isolation and loneliness: relationships with cognitive function during 4 years of follow-up in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing', *Psychosomatic Medicine* 75, pp. 161-170

Davidson, S., & Rossall, P. (2015, July 15). Evidence Review: Loneliness in Later Life. Retrieved October 30, 2018, from iii)

² Hawkey, L. C., PhD., Kozloski, M., PhD., & Wong, J., MA. (n.d.). A Profile of Social Connectedness in Older Adults. Academic Research Centers NORC@ the University of Chicago.

Here are some ideas for where to start:

<p>Volunteer</p>	<p>When you volunteer, you can impact someone’s life, meet new people and sharpen your skills. What’s not to love? Some ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use VolunteerMatch’s search engine at www.volunteermatch.org to find local opportunities. ● Put your construction skills to good use or learn in a supportive environment with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Texas Ramp Project: www.texasramps.org ○ Habitat for Humanity: www.habitat.org ○ United Way: www.unitedway.org/get-involved/volunteer ● Become a master naturalist and educate hikers in a Texas state park. Learn more at www.txmn.org. ● Get involved with National Service. Mentor elementary school children through Foster Grandparents. Serve on a team of volunteers with RSVP. Give a year of service with AmeriCorps VISTA. Find out more about these opportunities at www.nationalservice.gov.
<p>Get Involved with Your Neighborhood</p>	<p>You can often connect with others right in your own neighborhood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn more about the importance of connection and how to get started by visiting https://connect2affect.org/. ● Consider joining a neighborhood organization.
<p>Find a Community</p>	<p>Make new friends and reconnect with old ones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keep a regular schedule to call friends and family. Sign up to receive text reminders to stay in touch at www.connect2affect.org/remind-me. ● Search online for interest groups that meet in your area.
<p>Learn Something New</p>	<p>Lifelong learning options can expand your horizons.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Live near a college? Look into extension or informal courses. ● See what kind of classes your local community center or library offers.
<p>Explore Civic Engagement</p>	<p>Take your volunteering to the next level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Texas Silver-Haired Legislature is a nonpartisan group that aims to inform and motivate older Texans around aging issues. Learn more at txshl.org. ● Check out groups in your area such as Lions Club, Kiwanis or Toastmasters.