

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Humans are a social species. Maintaining social connection is essential for our health. Social support means having connections with people in your life who you can turn to during challenging times. Having a good social support system can help you:

- Cope better with stress (and even help lower blood pressure)
- Enhance your quality of life (e.g., better mood)
- Find important sources of fun, pleasure and a sense of belonging

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO BUILD YOUR SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

- 1. Be proactive:**
 - Make a plan to increase your social support system. Remember to set a goal that is simple and something you can actually do.
- 2. Seek out peers:**
 - It is amazing how supportive it feels to have someone say “me too!” when you share a tough experience or feeling.
 - Finding others who just “get it” and don’t need you to explain your pain can be a very motivating experience. Support groups increase social support with information, emotional support, new friendships and practical tips.
- 3. Use technology:**
 - You can stay connected with your social support system by making the most of social media.
 - If you feel isolated, consider text, FaceTime, Skype, email or an old-fashioned phone call.
 - There are benefits to joining an online support group. It can reduce your stress and offer you the opportunity to engage with others on days when it feels overwhelming to leave your home.
- 4. Try new activities based on your interests:**
 - Being more active can help reduce pain, improve mood and decrease stress. Think about what activities you enjoy now or enjoyed in the past and see if there is a related activity you could participate in.
 - Physically engaging in activities in new environments can help you develop new social connections.

5. **Build on existing connections:**

- Communication is key. If you don't answer phone calls or return emails and texts, the people in your life may think you don't want them around.
- Without making chronic pain the main topic of every conversation, you may need to find ways to gently let people know how things are going for you, even if they forget to ask. Ensure you are taking time to listen and find out how they're doing as well.
- Try not to retreat into social withdrawal when you need to cancel plans as a result of pain.

6. **Call for help:**

- Consider accessing Pain BC's free Pain Support Line at 1-844-880-PAIN, where you will find a safe space to talk about pain and its impact on your life and get more information on pain and self-management, community resources, Pain BC resources and programs, and much more.

RESOURCES

- <https://painbc.ca/find-help/pain-support-line>
- <https://painbc.ca/find-help/support-programs/pain-support-wellness-groups>
- <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/isolation>
- <https://whatsyourgrief.com/social-isolation/>
- <https://academic.oup.com/abm/article/53/1/65/4969712?login=false>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/less-pain-fewer-pills/201412/social-pain-physical-pain>