

Walking the *Good Life*

Why Our Brains Need Friends

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**The most powerful medicine for your brain is
completely free, has no side effects.**

It's not a supplement.

It's not an exercise program.

It's other people.

**Think of a time you
felt truly connected
and listened to.**

How did it feel?

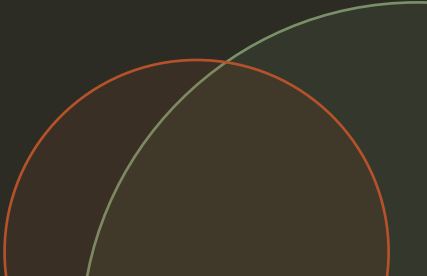




*“We are more alike,
my friends,
than we are
unlike.”*

Maya Angelou

Poet, author, civil rights activist • 1928–2014



Today's Path



The Heart of It

Why relationships are your greatest health asset



The Science

What connection does inside your brain and body



Living Proof

Okinawans show us the power of connection



Your Walking Orders

Three acts of connection to do starting today

THE HEART OF IT

Social Health is a Pillar of Health



**Physical
Health**



**Mental
Health**



**Social
Health**

The aspect of overall well-being that comes from connection and community , enjoying a sense of belonging, feeling supported, valued, and loved.

THE HEART OF IT

The Longest Study of Human Happiness

Harvard Study of Adult Development

85+

Years of Research

Begun 1938 — still ongoing

724

People Followed

Over their entire lifetimes

1,300+

Participants Today

Now includes spouses & children

“

Good relationships keep us happier and healthier.

Not income. Not job title. Not fame.

Relationships - and the quality of them shield us from life's difficulties, reduce physical pain, and add years to our lives.

-Robert Waldinger, MD author of the Good Life and lead research of Study of Adult Development



What the Numbers Say

50%

lower risk of early death
among people with strong
social ties vs. isolated adults

15

cigarettes per day the
equivalent health harm of
chronic loneliness

2-3×

faster cognitive decline in
isolated older adults vs. those
who are connected

Loneliness is a signal

Hunger is your body's way of telling you that you need food.

Similarly, loneliness is your body's way of telling you that you need connection.

Isolation is a form of Stress

01 Activates the same stress pathways as physical threats.

02 Drives Inflammation linked to heart disease, dementia, and depression.

03 Weakens Resilience - it erodes our ability to recover and stay mentally sharp.

THE SCIENCE

Our Brain Rewards Us For Seeking Connection



Oxytocin

Nature's Medicine

Anti-inflammatory, neuroprotective, immune-boosting. Bonds us together. Drives dopamine release.

Dopamine

The Reward Signal

Released through positive social interaction. Creates a feedback loop: connection feels good, so we seek more of it. Socializing becomes self-reinforcing.

Serotonin

Motivation & Desire

Makes socializing feel desirable, not effortful. Builds the inner drive to reach out, show up, and stay engaged with the people around you.

Loneliness is a slow erosion of the brain. Connection is its repair.

What isolation does to the brain

- Accelerates cognitive decline
- Raises inflammation markers
- Shrinks brain volume faster
- Doubles dementia risk

What connection does for the brain

- Builds cognitive reserve
- Reduces inflammation
- Strengthens memory networks
- Cuts dementia risk significantly

LIVING PROOF

Okinawa Longevity Research

Okinawa figured this out better than anyone else before the science caught up. It has one of the highest concentrations of centenarians on earth.



The Moai (/mo,eye/)

A small group of lifelong friends committed to supporting each other financially, emotionally, practically — for life.

Your Social Needs Are Your Own

How much you need depends on your wiring - introvert or extrovert, and your social battery.

- 01 You know your own battery** — Some people are restored by solitude. Others by crowds. Neither is wrong. Both are human.
- 02 Start noticing** — After social interactions, do you feel energized or drained? That data tells you something important.
- 03 Quality over quantity** — One close confidant is more protective than fifty acquaintances. Depth matters more than breadth.

My mom, Florence

She can walk into a hair salon and know her stylist's life story in one visit.

She does the same with the cashier at Lowe's, the plumber, and her accountant.



Her brain is doing important work, and the science proves it.

YOUR WALKING ORDERS

Small Interactions. Big Biology.

Research shows that even brief exchanges with strangers, a barista, a neighbor, someone in line measurably boost mood, sense of belonging, and cognitive engagement. We think strangers don't want to talk to us. We are almost always wrong.

Sarita and Tom showed us their Camino was richer because of who they met along the way. Neuroscience confirms it. So does my mom

YOUR WALKING ORDERS

The Power of Mealtime

Research links regular communal eating to lower loneliness, better mental health, and greater life satisfaction.



Train for Your Social Health

Sarita and Tom didn't just wake up one day and walk 200 miles. They trained.

Your brain and physiology depend on social connection the same way your body depends on movement, sleep and nutrition.

01 Talk to one stranger this week.

Eye contact. Something real. It doesn't have to be long.

02 Share an intentional meal.

Phone face-down. One real question. One real answer.

03 Call the person you've been meaning to call.

Today is a good day.



*On our camino of life,
connection is the whole point.*

Buen Camino.

"An exquisite book that reminds us our minds aren't soloists but symphony players."
—DAVID EAGLEMAN, PhD, author of *Incognito* and *Livewired*

Why Brains Need Friends

The Neuroscience of Social Connection



Ben Rein, PhD

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

The Good Life



LESSONS FROM THE WORLD'S LONGEST
SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF HAPPINESS

CREATE A MORE MEANINGFUL
AND SATISFYING LIFE

Robert Waldinger, MD
and Marc Schulz, PhD

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Vivek H. Murthy, MD

19TH SURGEON GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES

Together



The Healing Power of
Human Connection in a
Sometimes Lonely World

"Fascinating, moving, and essential reading."
—ATUL GAWANDE, author of *Being Mortal*