

Social Networks and Health



Although exercising, not smoking and maintaining a healthy weight are **crucial** for a healthy lifestyle, recent studies have found that good company can prolong life just as surely. A study of nearly 3,000 Dutch people between 55 and 85 years of age published in the American Journal of Epidemiology found that high and even moderate amounts of emotional support **cut the risk** of dying prematurely in half.

Scientists see a **powerful, connection** between good health and an active social life: Friends and family seem to offer strong protection against stress and all of the diseases that go along with it. As reported in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report on May 6, 2005, trying times just don't seem quite so trying when we know we have support. In recent years, scientists have found many ways to put this idea to the test. Some experiments are as simple as checking the pulse of people giving speeches. Speakers with friends in the audience feel more relaxed and have lower heart rates than speakers surrounded by strangers.

Of course, not all relationships are created equal. A close friend who will give you a ride to the doctor when you're sick is more important than a person you bump into once a year. Not all social ties will help ease stress, either. A turbulent, emotionally draining relationship can ramp up the stress in your life and threaten your health. After their first famous cold study, the Carnegie Mellon researchers found that conflict-ridden relationships **more than double** a person's chances for catching a cold.

Since your doctor can't write prescriptions for good friends and happy marriages, **it's largely up to you** to get the positive support you need. For starters, keep ties to friends and family active through regular contact. If possible, make time for your family to sit down and eat together. If your week is too busy to have a friend or relative over to eat, **get creative**: Invite him or her to go shopping with you, to accompany you on a long walk or to go the park with you and your kids. When stressful situations arise, don't be afraid to ask others for help. Communication holds people together. And if we aren't together, we're more likely to fall apart.



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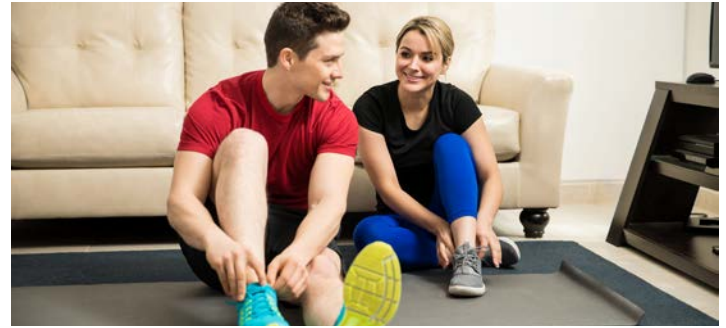
Home Gym on a Budget

The next time you see one of those expensive, high-tech exercise machines advertised on TV, **remember this:** You can't spend your way to fitness. Sure, that gym-quality contraption might look good in your spare bedroom. But in the end your success depends on you, not pricey equipment or steep monthly gym fees. Whether you have money to burn or are on a tight budget, you can build an entire home gym for a fraction of the price of one fancy machine.

First, ask yourself some basic questions. What kind of workouts will you be doing? How much space do you have? How much money can you spend? And perhaps most important if you're a beginner, are you physically ready to start working out? Check with your doctor before starting a fitness program, especially if you have any existing medical conditions, such as diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure, or heart trouble, or if you are at risk for any of these diseases.

Compile a list of the fitness equipment you'll need. No gym would be complete without something for doing resistance exercises. In your home gym, a little improvisation can go a long way. If you're a novice weight lifter, you can start by lifting large cans of soup or plastic bottles or plastic milk jugs filled with water or sand. Whatever you lift, be sure to use **proper technique**. It's the only way to get the maximum benefits without hurting yourself. Look for an instructional video online.

As your strength improves, you will probably want to buy real weights. While some weights are surprisingly expensive, you can definitely find some bargains. Look for used equipment in classified ads online or in your local newspaper. Some sporting



goods stores also specialize in secondhand equipment. You should be able to get hand weights (also called free weights) for anywhere between \$4 and \$150.

In addition to weights, you might want to buy some exercise bands. These inexpensive pieces of elastic **can mimic the workouts** from a Bowflex or other high-end weight machines. Again, an instructional video can help you get the most from exercise bands.

For the cardiovascular (also called aerobic) part of your workout, you have **plenty of low-cost options**. For the benefits of a top-quality stair stepper without the \$3,000 sticker price, you can buy a set of stepping benches and training tapes for about \$150. Resist buying a cheap stepping machine, according to the American Council on Exercise, inexpensive machines in general) are often low-quality and can wear out or break down before you get your money's worth. And don't forget the cheapest option of all – stairs!

Source: Exercise and Fitness Health Library
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Health Tip: Exercise Portion Control

To maintain a healthy weight, how much you eat is just as important as what you eat, says the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

Your optimal portion size may or may not match the serving size listed on a product. It's dependent on your age, weight and metabolism, among other factors.



To manage food portions at home, the agency recommends:

- Do not eat out of the box or bag. Take out a serving and eat it off a plate.
- Avoid eating in front of the TV or while busy with other activities.
- Focus on what you are eating, chew well and enjoy your food.
- Eat fewer high-fat, high-calorie foods.
- Eat meals at regular times.
- Buy low-calorie snacks.

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