Stressing the Importance of Friends

We know, of course, that stress can make us sick. But is avoiding stress really about working less and playing more? No, say many psychologists. Living without stress doesn’t mean living without complications...you could be caring for an older relative, worrying about your job, or feeling overwhelmed by money issues, yet still be calm. Stress is more than the sum of our chores, responsibilities, or finances. It’s also a state of mind and the way we act. Experts say it’s not about fleeing—it’s about having and being a friend.

Stress often comes from feeling alone. One of the best ways to care for yourself is to surround yourself with friends. Even though almost half of Americans say they’d rather be alone when they’re upset or uptight, research tells us that the best defense against stress hormones that can harm your health is to get plenty of emotional support.

Scientists have found that immune systems take a dive when people in stressful situations also report feeling lonely. Some sociologists suggest that social isolation can predict your risk for illness as much as smoking can. A 1989 study of women being treated for breast cancer found that those who met for group therapy reported less pain than those who didn’t. What’s more—the women who talked to one another in these groups survived nearly twice as long as those without such support. Similar findings have come from heart patients in group therapy.

People in your social circle often provide different types of support. There are friends you can trust with your most personal thoughts. Others are fun to be with socially. You can rely on some friends for advice or help when making major decisions. Still others offer practical aid; they can help you out in a pinch.

If you make a habit out of being a loner, your mental and physical well-being may depend on you making changes. Here are some ways to build connections into your life:

- **TAKE CHANCES**
  You may be surrounded by people, but are any of them people you could count on in times of crisis? If you have lots of friends but your talks never go much deeper than the state of the weather, take a chance. You don’t have to share your darkest secrets. Just bring up a minor worry or ask for a little advice. If you want to share your life, you have to open the door.

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QUILTING BEE-CAUSE OF WHI

The “Quilters,” a Dietary Change group from Stony Brook, New York, have created a work of art while changing what they eat. Each member was asked to make a quilt square that reflected her feelings or ideas about participating in WHI. The squares represent such themes as health, women, and families. The center square with the WHI logo was airbrushed by local artist Judy Schiek. Judy is too young to join the study but wanted to contribute to the group’s efforts. If you are interested in making a quilt with your group, talk to your Group Nutritionist.

(Front row: Sandra Sievers. Seated, from left to right: Ronnie Murtha, Martha Pierce, Anita McCallen, Barbara Schweller. Standing, from left to right: Clare Smigiel, Colette Mayer, Dee Jackson, Rita Regan, Patricia Judge, Evelyn Drager, Marie Skelly)

WHAT’S NEW

- Want some comfort food in a hurry? Try Fantastic Foods Stuffed Mashed Potatoes, a meal-in-a-cup in six low-fat flavors: Cheddar Cheese, Broccoli & Cheddar, Garlic & Herbs, Jalapeno Jack, Sweet Creamery Butter, and Sour Cream & Chives. Just add hot water to the cup, wait, and eat! The potatoes are filling, range from 2-3 grams of fat per serving, and taste nothing like cafeteria-style instant potatoes. Look for this product in the canned soup or natural foods section of your supermarket. You can also make your own low-fat mashed potatoes using chicken broth instead of butter and milk; they’ll reheat well with some extra broth stirred in.

- If you’re tired of cream cheese on your bagels, check out the Laughing Cow Light Spreadable Cheese Collection. Flavors like Ranch, Garden Vegetable, French Onion, and Garlic & Herb are tasty on low-fat crackers or baguette slices. Laughing Cow cheeses come conveniently wrapped in small wedges, making them very portable; each piece contains 2 grams of fat. You’ll find them in your grocer’s dairy section.

The information provided in this section is not an endorsement by WHI of specific food products.
Cranberry - Citrus Muffins

2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1-1/2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries
1 cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup 2% low-fat milk
1/3 cup light ricotta cheese
1 tablespoon grated orange rind
1/2 cup orange juice
1 tablespoon grated lemon rind
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
2 large egg whites
1 large egg
Cooking spray
6 tablespoons granulated sugar

Preheat oven to 400º F. Combine first 6 ingredients (flour through salt) in a medium bowl; make a well in center of mixture. Combine milk and next 8 ingredients (milk through egg); stir well with a whisk. Add to flour mixture, stirring just until moist. Spoon batter into 18 muffin cups coated with cooking spray. Sprinkle sugar evenly over batter.

Bake at 400º F for 18 minutes or until done. Remove from pans immediately, and cool on a wire rack.

Makes: 18 servings (18 muffins)

Fat: 2.5 grams per serving

Grain Servings: 1/2 per serving

Winter Squash Bisque

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 (2-pound) butternut squash, peeled, cubed (about 6 cups)
1 can (14-1/2 ounce) diced tomatoes, drained
2 tablespoons dry sherry
3 cans (14-1/2 ounce) vegetable broth
2/3 cups nonfat milk
1-1/2 teaspoons dried thyme
Nonfat sour cream to garnish

Heat olive oil in heavy large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add chopped onion and sauté until translucent, about five minutes. Add butternut squash and sauté until beginning to brown, about ten minutes. Add tomatoes and sherry. Boil until almost all liquid evaporates, about 30 seconds. Stir in 3 cans vegetable broth. Bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until squash is very tender, stirring occasionally, about 30 minutes.

Puree soup in blender in batches until smooth. Return soup to same saucepan. Stir in milk and thyme. Bring to simmer. Season soup to taste with salt and pepper. (Can be prepared 1 day ahead. Cover tightly and refrigerate. Bring soup to simmer before serving, thinning with more broth, if desired.)

Ladle soup into bowls. Top with a dollop of sour cream.

Note: Other varieties of sweet yellow-fleshed winter squash such as acorn squash are perfect for this soup. Nonfat milk and vegetable broth keep the soup low in fat, but also give it a surprisingly velvety texture.

Makes 6 servings

Fat: 5 grams per serving

Fruit/Vegetable servings: 2-3/4 per serving

Recipe from the Epicurious Recipe File (www.epicurious.com).
Healing Hands Embrace WHI

While Linda Raiteri knows that her WHI involvement will help future generations, she’s grateful that the education she’s receiving in her Dietary Change group is helping her right now. “I thought I knew a fair amount about nutrition and watching your diet, but I didn’t pay any attention to fat,” she says. “And it’s hard to describe, but my energy feels lighter now. We’re learning things, though they are specifically related to nutrition, that carry into other areas of our lives.” Linda first heard about WHI from her mother, who is in another part of the study.

When she’s not attending sessions at the Memphis Clinical Center, Linda’s life is very full. She teaches school part-time and is writing a screenplay, but her main job is working as a massage therapist. The hard work of massage has a hidden bonus: it enables her to easily reach her grain goal. “I snack a lot, mostly on grains like graham crackers and low-fat Tostitos,” she explains. “I have a problem keeping my weight up. After I give someone a massage, I’m hungry and I need something to get me built back up. I can eat grains between massages and they provide sustaining energy for me.”

Linda is sustained by more than just food, however. Her self-care routine includes regular massages, exercising with her beloved dog, Sundance, meditation, and deep breathing. “The easiest thing you can do is take deep breaths,” she notes. “You can feel the tension leaving you.”

Linda believes strongly in the importance of taking care of one’s whole self. “This seems to be especially hard for women to learn and to remember to do. The busier you are, the more you need to take time for yourself,” says Linda. “I was once in a meditation class and the leader asked one of the women how she felt when she looked at her baby. She tried to express all the love she had for her child and the instructor asked, ‘Does he have to do anything for you to feel that way about him?’ She said, ‘No.’ He replied, ‘Then love yourself the same way.’ I thought that was incredible advice. If we love ourselves with the fullness that we love our children—or in my case, my dog—then we will remember to take care of ourselves.”

Linda sees friendship as a mainstay of self-care, so it’s little surprise that she cherishes her Dietary Change group. “I love my group members,” she acknowledges enthusiastically. “These are women I would never have met otherwise. We really care about what’s going on in each other’s lives.” She adds, “The South fascinates me because I wasn’t born here. Some of the women in my group are true ‘steel magnolias’—strong, independent, gracious, and positive. I really enjoy it!”

Linda applies her philosophy about life to her WHI involvement: “Remember that this is an adventure. You may encounter frustrations, and it’s sort of interesting to see how you will handle it. It’s like watching a movie and saying, ‘What will I do in this situation? How is this going to turn out?’”

Chances are good that things will turn out very well for this energetic and determined participant.

▲ Linda Raiteri and Sundance
BE A FRIEND
Be approachable. Encourage people to lean on you a little, too. Studies have found that people who have relationships with two-way connections tend to be healthier than those who don’t. Rely on friends who know how to take and give so you won’t feel spent by those who never give back.

BOND WITH WOMEN
Studies show that women get more emotional support from their female friends than from relationships with men—even their husbands. Your Dietary Change group meetings are a great time to form friendships with other women.

WIDEN YOUR CIRCLE
It’s great to have a few close friends, but it’s also important to build a social network you can rely on at different times. What would you do if your best friend was away during a crisis? What if she moved? Make friends with a neighbor, join a club, start a craft group—anything to broaden your support.

Author and psychology professor Eugene Kennedy writes: “A lonely person cannot wait for friends to assemble around and take care of him. Friendship, for each of us, begins with reaching out. When a person asks that age-old question, ‘What can I do about my terrible loneliness,’ the best answer is still, ‘Do something for somebody else.’” WHI offers you an opportunity to help others.

Humans are, after all, both emotionally frail and social beings. It makes sense that the healthiest among us might be the ones who find rest in companionship, who can release stress by opening up to another.