

# A Healthier You

Official Newsletter for Members of the  
National Wellness & Fitness Association

2021



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## The Power of Peers Who Influences Your Health?

Do birds of a feather really flock together? The science says yes. People do tend to choose friends who are similar to them. You also become more like your friends over time. And that can influence your health.

Many behaviors spread socially. Examples include how much you exercise, how much alcohol you drink, whether you smoke, and what foods you eat.

Scientists are still trying to untangle why that is. Studies have found that activity in certain brain areas changes when other people are around. That can affect what you choose to do.

But this work also suggests that you can harness the power of social relationships to gain healthier habits—and motivate others to do the same.

## Social Influence

“People care about what others think across all different age groups—and that influences how much they value different ideas and behaviors,” says Dr. Emily Falk at the University of Pennsylvania. She studies how social networks affect decision making. This is called social, or peer, influence.

Teens are especially responsive to peer influence. That’s because their brains undergo changes that make them highly attuned to social situations. At the same time, the reward system in the teen brain becomes extra sensitive.

The reward system is a brain circuit that causes feelings of pleasure. It’s activated by things we enjoy, like eating good food. It’s also activated by social rewards, like getting a compliment.

And teens are just learning to navigate the social world. Understanding other people’s values and being influenced by them are important parts of socializing. Being influenced on things like clothing choices and musical taste can help teens learn to fit in and make friends. But taking part in risky behaviors, like drinking alcohol or smoking, can lead to health or legal consequences.

“Research shows that even just having another peer around can change the reward response in the brain and also the risk-taking tendencies of teenagers,” says Falk. Her team studies how peers affect teens’ driving behaviors and smoking decisions.

Some people seem to be more easily influenced than others, too. They may be more sensitive to feeling included or excluded by others. Or they may be more sensitive to social signals, like the tone of someone’s voice or their body language.

Dr. Mary Heitzeg’s team at the University of Michigan is doing research to better understand how a person’s biology and reactions to social situations affect whether they develop substance use or mental health problems later in life.

Using brain scans, the team is looking at how teens’ brains respond to being socially included or excluded. They’re also looking at how the brain’s reward system responds to different situations.

Heitzeg’s team is part of a large 10-year effort, called the ABCD Study, to understand the factors that influence teens’ health and risk behavior in the long term. Factors can include families, friends, schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

“Adolescence is such a risky period,” says Heitzeg. “That’s when sexual initiation happens, initiation and escalation of substance use happens, as well as other types of risky and delinquent behaviors, like risky driving.”

But it’s also a time that peer influence can help teens thrive if it gets them more involved with their community or helps them learn behaviors to get along with others, like how to cooperate or be empathetic.

## Peer Quality, Not Quantity

Positive and negative peer influences can affect more than just your behavior. They can also change the way you feel.

Studies show that, in general, the more friends you have and the more time you spend with them, the happier you are. Friends give you people to share your feelings with, to get new perspectives from, or to just do fun activities with.

But it’s the quality of those friendships—not quantity—that really makes the difference. Quality of friendships has been linked to higher life satisfaction and better mental health.

“We’ve all experienced letting a friendship go because it didn’t feel great,” says Dr. Rebecca Schwartz-Mette of the University of Maine. Her lab studies how peer relationships affect the emotional development of children and teens.

Friendships you feel you want to let go of may be low quality. They might be fraught with conflict, criticism, and aggression. For youth, low quality friendships are linked to poor academic performance and behavioral issues.

High quality friendships provide understanding, support, and validation of your self-worth. These types of friendships are more stable and are more satisfying.

Spending time with friends can be especially helpful for people with anxiety or depression. However, Schwartz-Mette’s studies have shown that depression can also be worsened by certain friendship qualities. One is called co-rumination.

“Co-rumination is basically when people get together and talk excessively about everything that’s going wrong and how bad they feel,” she explains. “With that person, they feel understood, validated, and that this person is emotionally close to them. But they get more depressed because they’re focusing their attention on negative things.”

Research suggests that it may help to refocus such friendships. Talk about both positive and negative things in your day. Look for healthy activities to get out and do together, like going for a walk. Encourage each other to keep up healthy habits like physical activity, healthy eating, and getting a good night’s sleep.

“Noticing that our behavior is influenced by other people, we can be intentional and try to focus on the people who are doing the things we want to get into ourselves,” Falk explains. “Sharing your healthy habits with other people could make a real difference to somebody else.” And to yourself.

*Article reprinted from NIH-News In Health*



## Fostering Positive Friendships

Parents can help guide their kids toward healthier friendships. Here are ways to help:

- **Stay involved.** Talk with your children about their lives and activities. Knowing what goes on can help you better guide them toward positive, healthy experiences.
- **Keep an eye on social groups.** Though children may identify with a certain peer group for a period of time, they often move from group to group. Try to steer them toward peers who support them in healthy ways.
- **Encourage kids to do healthy activities when they’re with friends.** For example, going for a walk or hike, playing recreational sports, or volunteering.
- **Provide ways for kids to take healthy social risks.** For example, find opportunities for teens to get involved with their community and meet new people with different perspectives. Or to meet someone who can teach them about a topic of interest.
- **Share examples from your own life.** Explain how you’ve found ways to meet new people and what activities you enjoy doing with others. Model the behaviors you’d like to see.
- **Create a sense of belonging and acceptance.** Kids can learn about healthy relationships from their family experiences.

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## Do Detox Diets and Cleanses Work?



Are you thinking of trying a “detox” or cleanse? They claim to help you lose weight or rid your body of toxins. After a winter of holiday eating, they might seem like a way to kickstart better habits in the new year. But are these trendy programs and products healthy or just a bunch of hype?

“Detoxes” aren’t all the same. Some involve fasting, followed by eating only certain foods. You may be limited to drinking only juices or liquids. Some include dietary supplements or herbs. They can involve cleansing the colon, or lower intestinal tract, with enemas and laxatives.

Are they effective? There aren’t many high-quality studies of detox programs and cleanses. In 2015, a team of experts concluded that results so far don’t support the use of detox diets for weight loss or removing toxins. Another group found that juicing and “detox” diets are probably just a short-term fix. There may be early weight loss because you start out consuming fewer calories. But detox diets tend to lead to weight gain once you resume a normal diet.

Detox diets can also have risks. The FDA has charged several companies for selling detox/cleansing products that contain harmful ingredients. Talk with your health care provider if you’re planning on starting a detox diet or cleanse to make sure it’s safe. Learn more about detoxes and cleanses.

*Article reprinted from NIH-News In Health*



# NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

The Annual Meeting of the Members of National Wellness & Fitness Association will be held at 12444 Powerscourt Drive, Suite 500A, St. Louis, MO 63131, on Thursday, August 26, 2021 at 11:00 a.m. (CST) for election of Directors and for the transaction of such other business as may properly come before the meeting and any adjournment thereof.

The above notice is given pursuant to the By-Laws of the Association.

## PROXY

### National Wellness & Fitness Association August 26, 2021 Annual Meeting of Members THIS PROXY IS SOLICITED ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL WELLNESS & FITNESS ASSOCIATION

The undersigned member of National Wellness & Fitness Association does hereby constitute and appoint the President of National Wellness & Fitness Association, the true and lawful attorney(s) of the undersigned with full power of substitution, to appear and act as the proxy or proxies of the undersigned at the Annual Meeting of the Members of National Wellness & Fitness Association and at any and all adjournments thereof, and to vote for and in the name, place and stead of the undersigned, as fully as the undersigned might or could do if personally present, as set forth below:

1. FOR [    ], or to [    ] WITHHOLD AUTHORITY to vote for, the following nominees for Board of Directors:  
Chris Kerber, Eric Demers and Jeff Wright
2. In their discretion, the proxies are authorized to vote upon such other business as may properly come before the Meeting.

This proxy, when properly executed, will be voted in the manner directed by the undersigned member. If no direction is made, this proxy will be voted for the election of directors and officers.

DATED: \_\_\_\_\_, 2021

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Please date and sign and return promptly to 12444 Powerscourt Drive, Suite 500A, St. Louis, MO 63131 whether or not you expect to attend this meeting. The Proxy is revocable and will not affect your right to vote in person in the event that you attend the meeting.

St. Louis, Missouri  
August 5, 2021  
Date

# National Wellness & Fitness Association

A Healthier You is published by:  
**National Wellness & Fitness Association**

For information regarding your membership  
and association services, call or write:

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**National Wellness & Fitness Association**  
**12444 Powerscourt Drive, Suite 500A**  
**St. Louis MO 63131**

**1-800-992-8044 or (636) 530-7200**

Articles in this newsletter are meant to be informative, enlightening, and helpful to you. While all information contained herein is meant to be completely factual, it is always subject to change. Articles are not intended to provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Consult your doctor before starting any exercise program.

Benefits may not be available in all membership levels.  
For more information, or to upgrade your membership, please call 1-800-387-9027.