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Staying Socially Active May Help Maintain Mental Fitness

Research links larger social networks to higher cognitive functioning in older adults

WASHINGTON, DC—Staying socially engaged with a wide circle of friends and family may help maintain our thinking skills and slow cognitive decline as we age, according to a report out today by the [Global Council on Brain Health](#) (GCBH).

"It's not uncommon for our social networks to shrink in size as we get older," said Marilyn Albert, Ph.D., GCBH Chair, Professor of Neurology and Director of the Division of Cognitive Neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. "This report provides many helpful suggestions about the things we can do to improve the *quality* of our relationships with family and friends, which may be beneficial in maintaining our mental abilities."

The Brain and Social Connectedness report addresses the social benefits of having pets, the role that age-friendly communities play in fostering social ties, and how close relationships promote both physical health and psychological well-being. The report also covers how social media like Facebook and Skype helps older adults maintain their social connections.

Separately, a new [AARP consumer survey](#) finds nearly 4 in 10 adults age 40-plus say they lack social connections and report worse brain health.

Tips for Improving Social Engagement

A few tips for older adults to help improve their social involvement:

- Cultivate social connections with people of different ages, including younger people.
- Join a club or take a class to meet new people.
- Visit, call, or email regularly with relatives, friends, and neighbors.
- Volunteer, or visit a lonely neighbor or friend.

"We know that loneliness and social isolation can increase physical health risks for older people," said Sarah Lock, AARP Senior Vice President for Policy, and GCBH Executive Director. "The GCBH's consensus that people who are socially engaged have a lower risk for cognitive decline shows us just how important social connections are to brain health."

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About GCBH

The GCBH, founded in 2015, is an independent international group of scientists, health professionals, scholars and policy experts working on brain health issues. Convened by AARP with support from [Age UK](#), the goal of the GCBH is to review the current scientific evidence and provide recommendations for people so that they can maintain and improve their brain health.

The full GCBH recommendations can be found here: www.globalcouncilonbrainhealth.org

Additional Resources

- [GCBH Recommendations on Physical Activity and Brain Health](#)
- [GCBH Recommendations on Sleep and Brain Health](#)
- AARP Foundation [Connect2Affect](#)

About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With nearly 38 million members and offices in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also works for individuals in the marketplace by sparking new solutions and allowing carefully chosen, high-quality products and services to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the world's largest circulation publications, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

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