

Health Tip: Healthy Relationships

Strong relationships are important to your happiness and a healthy life. People with good quality friendships handle stress much better; a good friend can really help you in difficult times. People with a supportive partner recover better from heart attacks and other illnesses than people who do not have friends. Research shows that physical affection between loving partners, parents and children, and close friends can help the brain, heart and other body systems.

One of the most important ingredients for healthy relationships of any kind is open and honest communication. Don't expect your partner to read your mind, and don't try to read his/her mind either. Ask honest questions and give honest answers. Work to create an environment in which each of you can feel safe expressing thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams with the other.

Some communication skills worth enhancing include:

- **Empathy.** This is the ability to understand and express interest in another person's feelings and point of view. This does not mean you have to agree with it. Just acknowledge it and try to understand. It shows the other person that you care.
- **Acceptance.** Recognize that you can't make your friend or partner change. You should take responsibility for your own feelings, attitudes, and actions rather than trying to change the other person. Others will enjoy your company a lot more when you do this.
- **Valuing others.** Be aware that people want to be valued, appreciated and in control of what is around them. Pay attention to your interactions with your friends and try to foster these feelings in them.
- **Listening.** Last but not least, be a good listener. This means keeping good eye contact and an open posture by not crossing your arms or legs, and being able to paraphrase what the speaker has said before giving your opinion.

Sometimes a person can have a good relationship with their partner and children, but have problems at work. Others may have great friendships but have difficulty relating to their children. Almost everyone can work to improve their relationship skills in some area of their lives. Think about the relationships in your life that are important to you and relationships that you would like to improve. For the next two weeks, plan to do something for them that you think they might like. Don't expect something in return.

On a regular basis, try some of the following strategies for boosting your relationships:

- **Show lots of appreciation and affection.** "Please" and "thank you" for even little things show that you're not taking each other for granted. Spontaneous hugs and those little kisses are reminders that you love and value your partner.
- **Support each other emotionally and in practical ways.** Divide up the day-to-day workload in a way that makes each of you comfortable.
- **Emphasize positive traits** much more often than pointing out what needs to be improved. This is especially true with children.
- **Laugh with your friends each day**, either in person, on the phone or through e-mail.
- **Make yourself available.** Support others when they need it and ask for help with you need someone to listen.

Work as hard on your relationship as you do on other things that are important to you.

You and the people you care about will be happier and healthier for your efforts. When in doubt, do not be afraid to seek professional help; find someone who makes you feel comfortable to talk to.

Sources: LifeWork Strategies (www.youradvocate.com), and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.