

# Social support is all-important

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Studies confirm what many of us know intuitively about the benefits of a strong social support system. People with close, confiding friendships are less anxious and depressed and are physically healthier. Sharing feelings with loved ones has been shown to increase our immune response. Even when battling a serious illness, people who are part of a support group and have supportive friends and family tend to live longer. For many people, being surrounded by loving relationships helps fulfill their day-to-day need for sustenance.

Campus life offers many opportunities to initiate and develop friendships. It's not always easy though, especially if you have a quiet or shy temperament. Sometimes students feel guilty about spending time with friends—thinking maybe it takes away from their study time. In truth, investing in friendships does require time and effort. But it is a worthwhile investment that will make you feel happier and less stressed. Lower stress levels increase your ability to concentrate and learn when you do study, which ultimately contributes to your success.

Think about the people in your life. Is there someone you could call right now to invite to a movie? If you're feeling stuck with a homework assignment, which friend could you approach for help? Is there someone you can confide in?

**If you would like to have more friends, or you would like to deepen your current friendships, consider the following:**

- An obvious place to make new friends is class. Smile at your classmates. Sit next to someone new in class and start up a conversation. Some possible conversation starters: make a comment or ask a question about the last lecture, reading, or problem set; offer a compliment (you like their clothes, the question they asked); or help out (you noticed they were out last week, offer to lend them your notes).
- Get involved in activities you enjoy, and you will improve your chances of meeting someone with mutual interests. Check out student clubs, exercise classes, volunteer opportunities.

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- Set aside time at least twice a week to be with a friend. Chat, laugh, study, go for a walk, or work through a conflict (even good friends fight!).
- Try not to compete. Be happy instead of jealous when your friends succeed--and they will be more likely to celebrate your accomplishments in return.
- Be open to different kinds of friendships. Not all of them need to be based on a deep, emotional connection. You might have exercise friends with whom you enjoy lighthearted conversation. Some friendships last only a little while, perhaps just the duration of a semester or class project. Others friendships you make at Cal may last a lifetime.
- Let close friends take care of you. Do you tend to take care of others a lot? Are you private about your needs? Allow yourself to be vulnerable and receive help and emotional support from others.
- Enjoy online and email friendships, if you wish. But remember to have a balance of "live" friendships. There is no substitute for conversation and affection from a friend sitting next to you.
- Know when to say "no" and when to say "yes." Spending time with people who aren't supportive can add stress and take away valuable time. So surround yourself with people who care about you.