

## Staying Connected

Did you know that there is a “feel good” hormone called oxytocin? This hormone is responsible for positive thinking and maintaining an optimistic view on life. Oxytocin also helps with bonding and can generate feelings of compassion. This then leads to the expansion of trust for those individuals. So how do we release this hormone? The answer, human touch. This could be as simple as a pat on the back, a hug, or a handshake, to name a few.

Physical touch can also increase levels of dopamine and serotonin. These are neurotransmitters that help regulate your mood and help your body relieve stress and anxiety. Touch can also have a positive effect on your health. It can boost your immune system and lower blood pressure. A study found that women who receive more hugs from their partners have lower heart rates and blood pressure than those that do not receive these hugs.

Not having physical touch is one of the many things people are struggling with since the onset of COVID-19. Since the pandemic began, people have experienced a wide range of cognitive and physical symptoms, such as changes in appetite, sleep, gastrointestinal issues, low energy, worry and forgetfulness. In addition to those issues, people are experiencing more headaches, likely caused by an increase in screen time due to work life changes.

Studies show that isolation and loneliness can raise stress levels. With social distancing in place, people are unable to be as social as they may have been in the past, reducing the opportunities for physical touch. This, in turn, causes an increase in isolation and feelings of loneliness. Studies have also shown that expressing feelings of love and affection can actually lower stress levels. Surprisingly, purely expressing those feelings can have the same benefits as physical touch and socializing.

It is beneficial for your health to be able to stay social. With social distancing in place, many people are resorting to simpler ways of communicating with others. This includes talking to neighbors when outside, going on walks, or even visiting from their yards or front porches. People are also becoming more creative with technology, communicating through online applications such as Zoom, Tik-Tok, Facetime, and Google Duo. This provides a safe way to connect and talk to family and friends who do not live with you or that you are not able to see in person due to COVID-19. This is especially important for those who live alone without children, roommates, or partners, as they are at the most risk for negative effects of isolation and lack of physical touch. Staying socially connected is key in times like this.

There are other ways you can stay connected to others and with your emotions. Finding an outlet through which to express yourself, such as writing music, stories or poems or getting in touch with your artistic side can also be helpful. Becoming “pen pals” with someone you can’t see in person is a great way to connect and share what’s happening in your life. The possibilities are only limited by a person’s imagination.

Being “physically” distant does not mean that you have to be “socially” distant. There are many ways for people to stay connected and avoid feelings of isolation while also being safe for themselves and others. Reach out to people in different ways, especially to those who live alone. You’ll not only lift their spirits but yours as well.

## **References**

<https://plushcare.com/blog/advantages-of-human-touch-hugs/>

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-importance-of-staying-connected-while-practicing-social-distancing/>

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/social-distancing-doesnt-have-to-keep-you-socially-distant/>

## **Here are some other resources on staying connected:**

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/alone-together-why-its-physical-distancing-not-social-distancing/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-touching-your-partner-can-make-both-of-you-healthier>