

*How Close Friends*

# Can Improve Your Health



**They make life easier, happier and more caffeinated (yay, coffee runs!). Turns out, pals get you healthier too—in ways you never imagined.**

Friendships are important, and may be even better for you than you think. According to science, it's good for us—both now and as we age. Here are a couple of ways having good friends can be beneficial.

The logo for 'myMood MATTERS' features a stylized leaf icon above the text 'myMood' in a cursive font, with 'MATTERS' in a bold, sans-serif font below it.

## **Friends are preventive medicine.**

It's more than just your pal bringing over soup when you're sick: Having good friends can help protect your body from stress. In a series of studies conducted at the University of Virginia, people were faced with the threat of getting an electric shock either while solo or while holding a friend's hand. MRI scans revealed that in those clinging to a pal, the brain regions that sense danger were significantly less active.

That well-being boost may translate to the ultimate payoff: a longer life. A study from Brigham Young University found that people with strong social relationships had a 50 percent greater chance of living longer than those with weaker ties. The researchers concluded that a lack of social interaction can pose as much of an early-death risk as smoking and alcoholism, and a higher risk than obesity and physical inactivity. There you go: yet more motivation to quit playing text tag and schedule that catch-up dinner.

## **The right mates make you strong.**

Not feeling your workout lately? Rope in a friend, ideally a really fit one. Doing physical activity with a companion who's in top shape may make you go at it harder than if you exercised with a less in-shape one, per a small study from Santa Clara University's department of psychology. (Although your super-buff pal won't reap added fitness benefits by working out with you, she will be racking up some serious karma points.)

It's no wonder, then, that buddies are one another's best weight watchers. Researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health found that when overweight people were grouped with friends or family as part of a weight-loss program, they lost 6 1/2 more pounds and shaved an extra 1 1/4 inches off their waists than those who just received info on diet and exercise. Why's that? The study authors quote an African proverb: "If you wish to go fast, go alone. But if you wish to go far, go together."