

## Build Intentional Relationships

In our discussions regarding well-being and strategies to reduce fatigue, we often hear many of the same messages: eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly, and avoid unhealthy habits. While diet and exercise are essential to well-being, scientific evidence reveals another powerful predictor of health and longevity - our relationships. Strong, supportive social connections can have a positive effect on our physical health, leading to reduced inflammation, improved cardiovascular function, and a stronger immune system.

Decades of research, including the Harvard Study of Adult Development, have consistently demonstrated the profound impact of relationships<sup>1</sup>. This research indicates that it's not about the number of friends we have, but the quality of our close ties. These relationships provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, encourage healthy behaviors and choices, and help buffer life's stresses.

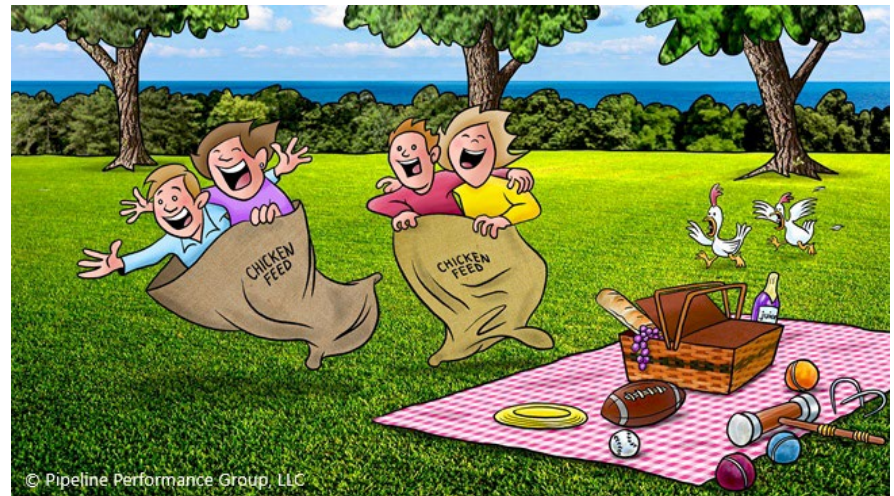
The importance of relationships is universal, but shift workers face unique challenges in nurturing these close personal connections. Irregular schedules, night shifts, and working when others are off can disrupt traditional social rhythms, reducing the natural opportunities for spontaneous social interaction. This can lead to:

- **Social Isolation:** Difficulty in aligning schedules with friends and family, leading to a sense of isolation.<sup>2</sup>
- **Strain on Existing Relationships:** Partners, children, and friends may struggle to understand and adapt to unusual work hours.
- **Limited Opportunities for New Connections:** Networking and meeting new people can be challenging outside of a traditional 9-to-5 environment.
- **Fatigue and Reduced Energy for Socializing:** The demands of shift work can leave little energy for social engagement, even when opportunities arise.

For shift workers, building meaningful relationships requires effort and intentionality. If you are unsure where to start, consider some of these recommendations to help build and support your important relationships:

1. **Communicate Openly and Often:** Explain your schedule to loved ones. Help them understand the challenges of shift work and set clear expectations.
2. **Schedule Dedicated Time:** Just as you schedule appointments, set aside time for relationships. This might mean a regular video call with family, a standing golf or basketball game with friends on your days off, or planning activities in advance to fit around your shifts.
3. **Prioritize Quality Over Quantity:** Focus your energy on a few truly meaningful relationships. These are the people who will be there for you, understand your challenges, and genuinely support you.
4. **Be Proactive:** Don't wait for others to reach out. Initiate plans, send thoughtful messages, and show up when you can.

We are wired for personal connection. For shift workers, whose lives are complicated by irregular schedules, the deliberate investment in strong relationships isn't just about happiness – it's about health and well-being. Make relationships a non-negotiable part of your personal health and wellness plan.



<sup>1</sup> [What Harvard's Study of Adult Development Reveals about Happiness](https://www.robertwaldinger.com/post/what-harvard-s-study-of-adult-development-reveals-about-happiness), <https://www.robertwaldinger.com/post/what-harvard-s-study-of-adult-development-reveals-about-happiness>, accessed June 27, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> [Shift Work and Mental Health: Impact and Coping Strategies](https://mindthefrontline.org/members-only-blog/shift-work-and-mental-health-impact-and-coping-strategies), Chris Smetana, AS, FP-C, CCP-C, NRP, <https://mindthefrontline.org/members-only-blog/shift-work-and-mental-health-impact-and-coping-strategies>, January 11, 2024.