

New study shows meaningful social interactions boost well-being, but context matters

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Engaging in meaningful social interactions with peers is associated with lower loneliness and greater affective well-being, new research published

in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* finds. Researchers followed three cohorts of university students over three years, collecting data on their social interactions and momentary well-being.

Prior research has focused on the impacts of social interactions and the contexts in which interactions occur, such as places and activities. However, the new research specifically examines the impact of meaningful interactions on well-being.

"Our research indicates that engaging in meaningful social interactions have net positive outcomes for affective well-being, stress, and loneliness," says lead author Mahnaz Roshanaei, of Stanford University. "Spending more time in substantive and deep conversations with anyone with either strong or weak ties, results in benefits for the average person's well-being outcomes."

However, the study also reveals that the context in which these interactions occur plays a role.

- **Face-to-face matters:** The study found greater benefits for well-being when meaningful social interactions happened in person, compared to compared to other [communication channels](#) like direct messaging and texting
- **Activity matters too:** Meaningful social interactions while resting led to higher well-being compared to those occurring during activities like studying or dining.

Researchers also noted that, while the COVID-19 pandemic wasn't a main focus, there was a shift in the impact of context during lockdowns. Before the pandemic, the setting of social interactions mattered more for well-being. During the quarantine, however, social interactions tended to have a positive impact on well-being whether they happened online or elsewhere.

The researchers acknowledge limitations in their study, namely that it focused on [university students](#) and may not be generalizable to the entire population or beyond the US. Future research will explore these findings in more diverse groups and delve deeper into the subjective experience of social interactions.

Still, Dr. Roshanaei believes that the research findings can be used to help develop strategies and resources that improve our well-being.

"In the future, the results of this study can be used in designing personalized intervention-oriented strategies for encouraging healthy social lives," says Dr. Roshanaei, "such as personalized recommendations for maintaining social support and connections."

More information: Meaningful Peer Social Interactions and Momentary Well-Being in Context, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/19485506241248271](https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241248271)

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