



# 10 ways to make new friends

By Christine Crosbie

**T**here is no doubt that friendships can be our biggest asset. Feeling connected to friends and neighbours leads to a sense of well-being and contentment. It has also been shown to reduce blood pressure (really!) and is an important factor in preventing depression. Having good friends can be even more beneficial than

having close family ties. Your friends like you because they choose to be your friends, not because they have any sense of familial obligation.

So what do you do if many of your good friends have moved away to live in retirement or assisted-living residences, or to be closer to their families? You take action! Here are

10 super suggestions to help you take the first steps toward forging new friendships.

## 1 Put yourself out there

New friends aren't going to come knocking at your door, so get out of your home and into places where you'll meet people with interests you share. Become a volunteer with a charity you support or take a course.

Do you have a dog? No? Walk a neighbour's dog. Hang out at the dog park and make new friends while your pet does too. Talking about dogs is even easier than talking about your kids or grandkids. If you don't have a pet but like animals, contact your local humane society—they're often looking for volunteers.

How about taking a trip? Many people meet new friends on cruises or adult-only holidays. There are lots of inexpensive holiday options these days and most offer singles supplements.

## 2 Make a connection

We may pass dozens of people a day, but we don't often make connections. If you run into the same person from time to time, take the initiative and start a conversation. Remember to make eye contact, smile and keep it light.

One of the "rules" of social interaction is to spend 30 per cent of the time talking and 70 per cent listening. You want to give the other person a chance to tell you something about their life. Don't forget to introduce yourself at some point in the conversation, even if it's a brief chat: "It was great talking to you. By the way, my name is..." Next time you run into this person, you can pick up from where you left off.

## 3 Reconnect

Forget petty arguments and forgive friends for past disagreements. Call up relatives you've lost touch with. Sometimes distance or changes in life circumstances can cause people to drift apart. Reach out and make an

effort to revive those relationships. Think about what made you friends in the first place and make that your focus. You may find it easier to call up an old friend than to find a new one.

## 4 Surf the web

Going online can give you two great ways to meet new people with the same interests. First, by taking a course at your local library or school to learn how to improve your computer skills (or start from square one, if that's the case) you will meet other students with the same aim. Some community centres or computer stores have classes designed just for seniors, so you're bound to meet someone else who is familiarizing themselves with the internet. Another option is to book some computer time at your local library—you may meet someone there too.

The second benefit of the internet is that you can connect with others on social networking sites such as Facebook and Classmates.com.

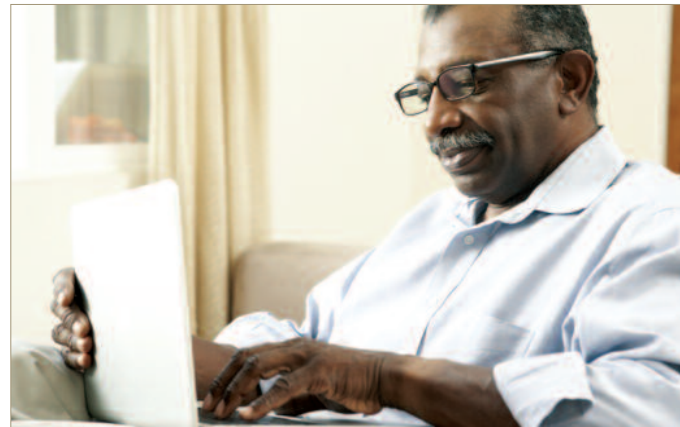
Although the 55+ age group makes up only a small percentage of the Facebook user demographic, it is growing faster than any other! Find friends from your former workplaces, high school or college. There are also websites that

cater specifically to older adults who want to connect with others their age.

A word to the wise: don't give out personal information such as your address or credit card number on these sites, and be careful if you decide to meet your online friend in person. Meet in a public place and take someone with you in case the person is not who they made themselves out to be.

"The only way to have a friend is to be one."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



### Go online

Consider trying the following online resources:

- [www.thirdage.com/friendship](http://www.thirdage.com/friendship)
- [www.seniorsinfo.ca](http://www.seniorsinfo.ca)
- [www.50plus.com](http://www.50plus.com)
- [www.senioryears.com](http://www.senioryears.com)
- [www.canada55plusgames.com](http://www.canada55plusgames.com)
- [www.solutionsmagazine.ca](http://www.solutionsmagazine.ca)



## 5 Real-life social networking

If computers aren't your thing, try the original way of social networking: get friends to introduce you to other friends of theirs. Invite people you know for lunch or coffee and ask them to bring someone you haven't met yet.

Initiate a little get-together; make it a regular monthly event if everyone's interested. Invite new people to join your book or bridge club, your walking group or any other regular activities you participate in.

## 6 Entertain

Sometimes when an older person loses a spouse, friends feel awkward about inviting them to dinners and parties on their own. That can lead a person to feel isolated at a time when they need their friends the most. Reach out to friends who are single or widowed and invite them on outings and to special events.

If you're the single person, take the lead and talk to some of your couple friends about getting together to socialize. Let them know you're okay with going out with them on your own.

## 7 Say yes!

It can be so easy to turn down invitations or avoid events where you may not know everyone. Just finding the right clothes and getting ready to go out can seem like a lot of work if you're not a natural social butterfly. But think about the last few parties or dinner events you turned down—they were lost opportunities to meet

new people. Make the effort to go and you probably won't regret it. If you're truly shy, ask whether you can bring a guest to the occasion in order to boost your self-confidence.

## 8 Be a friend

An increasing number of studies suggest that giving support to someone makes us feel even better than receiving it. Think of people you know who could use a hand or a little company. Visit others who may have problems with mobility and don't get out as often as they should. You don't have to do chores for them, just visit and talk and, most importantly, listen. Before you go, take the time to select an interesting magazine article you can discuss or think of some new ideas or activity to share. You will have much more fun if you have something to talk about.



## 9 Be yourself

While we all want to make a good first impression upon meeting someone new, don't try to be someone you're not. Be genuine and let your real personality shine through. Share a bit about yourself, your thoughts, your stories and your aspirations.

## 10 Hang on to your old friends

Old friends provide a link to your former life when you move or if your circumstances change. They can offer you a sympathetic ear when you have fears or worries. These comfortable friendships keep you connected with your past and become even more valuable as you age. Don't take long-time friends for granted. These relationships should be cherished and nourished to last a lifetime. ●

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### Food for thought

How to be a good friend:

- Be patient.
- Don't offer advice unless asked.
- Be reliable.
- Stay in touch.
- Listen more than you speak.