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A Part of Living Healthy – Friendship

We all know the basics of living healthy – eating right, exercise, getting enough sleep. But did you know that your social life is a critical part of your physical health? Researchers have shown that loneliness and isolation are as damaging to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is more dangerous than other risk factors such as obesity, www.campaigntoendloneliness.org. This isn't about being an extroverted party animal; it's about developing close friendships that you can rely upon. That is why two of the key areas of work for members of the AARP/World Health Organization Age Friendly Network of Communities, www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities, are social and civic participation – fun and meaningful engagement.

St. Petersburg is a friendly city, but even so, if you've relocated here from somewhere else, recently left a job, or experienced the loss of a spouse or the emptying of your nest, making new connections can be a challenge. Fortunately, AARP's Livability Index www.aarp.org/livabilityindex shows St. Pete is an unusually easy place to connect with others:

- Place of worship – When asked how people connect to others, faith communities usually are second only to family.
- Neighborhood association – St. Petersburg has a network of neighborhood associations www.stpete.org/neighborhoods, that work with city government to provide neighbors opportunities to socialize, raise concerns, and work together to improve their neighborhood.
- Volunteer – There are many worthy organizations in need of volunteers (including AARP!), and giving back to an organization you care about is a great way to build friendships with like-minded people. AARP's volunteer matching site, Create the Good www.createthegood.org, is a great place to start.
- AARP Member Meetups – As part of AARP's work in Tampa Bay, we host opportunities for AARP members to get together for a variety of reasons – from movie screenings to technology classes to arts demonstrations at local museums and galleries. Check www.aarp.org/tampabay, for the current schedule
- Parks and Rec – The City of St. Petersburg offers classes on a dizzying range of topics in community centers and parks across the city, www.stpeteparksrec.org/classes.html, which is another great way to meet people with similar interests.
- Join a team – I have discovered I can blend my physical and social health by working out with a team. As a swimmer, I have discovered that my teammates on St. Pete Masters Swimming, www.stpetemasters.org, not only keep me motivated in the pool but are a great community of supportive friends.

Whatever outlet works for you, be sure to find ways to feed those relationships with good time just as you feed your body with good food!

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