

"As we begin to emerge from the restrictions we've been living under for months, it's important to reconnect with not just our friends and family but our community too."

It's time to reconnect

→ By Isobel Moran

One of the things we learned about ourselves and each other during the pandemic, is that we as humans have a inbuilt need for social interaction and communication.

As the pandemic forced us into social isolation, it fiercely highlighted what social creature's humans are. A lack of social interaction has made life hard for many people missing close friends, family and the special touch of a loved one.

As the world opens back up again, and we begin to emerge from the restrictions we've been living under for months, it is important to reconnect with not just our friends and family but our community too. This will have a positive impact on our mental health in particular for people living on their own who might be experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Although it has been refreshing in some ways to get a bit

of alone time, experiment in the kitchen or sunbathe in the garden, social interaction and being there for one another is what we have missed most in these challenging times.

Whilst socially distancing, we've all had to get creative with how we spend our time and how we bond with others - whether that be a zoom quiz night, virtual date night or sending a card or letter to someone special.

Ironically, this has meant many of us staying in touch more frequently as we have adapted to these new ways to communicate with our loved ones. Here at Wellburn, our staff have gone above and beyond to ensure residents felt as close as possible to their

loved ones during these uncertain times, whether this be with regular video updates or special Skype/Facetime calls.

Technology has played a huge part in allowing us to keep in touch with the important people in our lives through this pandemic, with social media platforms and the rise in popularity of Zoom allowing us to stay connected in a variety of fun ways. With many of our residents being less familiar with these technologies, our staff are at hand to help family members and friends overcome these technological barriers.

At Wellburn, we recognise the importance of nurturing loving relationships across staff, residents and family members. During the various stages of lockdown, the bonds between residents and staff have grown stronger than ever as the need for greater companionship and understanding has required extra special efforts.

So, with good relationships being fundamental to our wellbeing and many of us now more than ever appreciating the importance of social contact, it's time to put this into practice as we make the move from virtual to in-person human interactions.

Here at Wellburn, we've been working on the gradual return of visitors to our homes in the most COVID-safe way possible as we know this is vital for both our resident's mental and physical wellbeing. And for everyone, we must remember that it will take time for many of us to find our way back to normality and resume life.

But now, as restrictions lift and we hope that the worst is over, what can we do to reconnect with the people in our lives that we have missed? →

Right: Friends meeting up for an early morning jog. **Far right:** Putting those new found baking skills into action. **Below:** Meeting with a friend in the park. **Below right:** Meeting up with friends for a coffee.



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← Getting back out there

Start with small activities such as going on a short walk with a loved one. Meet a friend and grab a coffee on a Sunday morning or pack a flask of tea and a picnic and have a sunny park bench lunch. You could sit and catch up while watching the world go by.

Seeing people out and about again doing normal things will all help us adjust to moving on to this next phase and feeling more normal again. You could make it a regular activity (weather pending!) and take it in turns to pack some food, and maybe bake some food to have after.

Whatever you choose to do, it's important to look after your wellbeing and take things at your own pace as we make the long-awaited transition to normality.

Reach out

Don't worry if you've lost touch with some friends or family over the lockdown, there are plenty of ways you can reconnect as the pandemic comes to an end.

To start, don't be afraid to make the first move - a simple hello explaining that you want to catch up can go a long way! You can suggest meeting in person, if possible, to have the more personal experience we have all missed.

Having said this, it's important you know your personal preferences and the people who you are meeting concerning COVID guidelines. By stating your preferences on issues such as mask-wearing, hugging and vaccinations, your social plans with family and friends can be more open, honest and fluid. But, reaching out doesn't just apply to making social plans. Make sure you know



friends involved in your workout and get in a catch up too! With the rate of COVID transmission being far lower outside, you might find it helpful to plan reconnecting events outside, especially when the weather is nice this summer!

If you're not quite ready to meet up in person, there are plenty of online classes you can subscribe to together or even just start a video call and exercise from your living room.

Pop round next door

If you're unsure of who to reconnect with as restrictions lift, try checking in to see how your neighbours are doing with a quick doorstep chat. If you're nervous, pop a note through the letterbox or start a WhatsApp group to say hello.

With everyone baking their way through the pandemic, why not use your newfound baking skills and take your bakes next door to enjoy with neighbours on a warm summer evening. You'll find most of the time people are eager to have a catch-up and get involved with activities that build community spirit.

There for one another

Finally, with many people anxious about the gradual return to normality, now more than ever we must pull together, show compassion and look out for one another. It's important that we take things at our own pace, but equally that we try and challenge ourselves to try something different each day or every few days (turn to *pg 18* to read our feature on what a new post pandemic normal might look like). ■

who's in your support network and reach out to them when you need. These can be people or organisations that can provide you with friendship, familial, community, emotional and even logistical support.

And let's not forget that old fashioned ways of communicating are still really valued by older adults and can mean a lot so why not send a letter and make someone's day. This is also a great way to communicate with people that are clinically vulnerable or aren't quite ready for in-person contact yet. Receiving something handwritten from a loved one is special and always feels more personal than just typing something over text or email.

Get your sweat on

With exercise having such a positive impact on our wellbeing, it's important to try and incorporate this into our daily routine. Why not try getting your family members or

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