

Girlfriend Getaways: The Science Says Do It

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Most people probably don't need an excuse to book a long-weekend getaway with close friends – especially women. But now there may be science to back your excuse for a girls' trip!

Studies have shown friendship can extend life expectancy, lower chances of heart disease, and increase the production of oxytocin – the hormone that's released in our bodies that makes us feel good when we're happy.

Wellness experts say the friendship factor effect is because humans are social beings. There are multiple parts to the wellness equation - nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise – and relationships are part of it as well.

"Some people get their relationships in big families, others get the relationships at work, but others have social networks that help them get through the bumps of life. So when you have women going on trips and enjoying themselves that's part of this. So no matter what it is, that connectivity to other people is a part of the fabric of our well-being," said Dr. Tim Vega, OSF HealthCare.

Dr. Tim Vega with Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare focuses on wellness for the general population as well as for medical providers. He says everyone needs to establish those social connections, the younger the better, and keep them as you age for a longer life.

The science seems to bear this out, too. Harvard researchers found that people who don't have strong friendships tend to be more depressed, have later-life cognitive decline, and, were more likely to die at a younger age. Another study found that the risk of dementia increased depending on how lonely people felt.

Dr. Vega says there are wellness initiatives that focus on older people who are isolated with a goal to reverse that.

"If you have an elderly person who is connected to their community, their church or other connections, they live longer, they're happier, they're more energetic and have more productivity. Take that same person and isolate them – let's say their family moves away and they're just in an apartment by themselves - you'll see them physically, mentally, and socially deteriorate over time, explains Dr. Vega.

Dr. Vega acknowledges all of this takes work, especially if you're doing things like going on vacations with girlfriends. These things tend to die down over time because your job, children – life in general – can get in the way. But making sure you make the extra effort to keep those relationships part of your life, including the extra planning and timing involved, is worth the effort.

Learn more about the benefits of a good social support system [here](#).