

FRIENDSHIPS A VITAL PART OF PERSONAL HEALTH

BY TONISHA MELVIN



Some friendships last forever, and some may dwindle, but the emotional experiences you gain will carry deep meaning and cause significant changes throughout your life. Some emotional experiences will facilitate mutual understandings or misunderstandings, support, deep conversations, empathy and/or sympathy in unexpected loss or sorrow, and/or celebrations for an individual's or loved one's milestones.

Throughout most of the last two of the four-plus decades of my life, I've met a lot of people I consider dear friends. They have played important roles in my life and are in some ways closer to me than family because they share similar experiences, cultures, beliefs, or backgrounds. The beauty of life is that we have the opportunity to connect with different types of friends who meet different needs. Some are closer than others, but ultimately, we decide if we want them in our lives for years to come. In my own life, I can remember four main types of friends: the fitness guru, the foodie, the good listener with sound advice, and, of course, over the last few decades, the social media associate.

I have had friends who like fitness and will wake up at the crack of dawn to exercise with me. These friends are invaluable because they choose to wake up with me early with patience, care, motivation, praise, and thoughtful criticism when I want to indulge in food that negates my entire workout.

A person who cares enough to help you reach a fitness goal is one to cherish; there have been many times my spouse hasn't awakened that early to work out with me.

We appreciate foodie friends because they help us explore our palates to indulge in fine foods continentally or intercontinentally. But these are also friends to be wary of; they'll force you to rely heavily on the fitness guru friend more often than a few times a week.

I've also had friends who encompassed all of the above qualities and hold one of the most important roles a friend plays: the good listener with sound advice. This is the friend you can go to for honest and unbiased opinion.

Last, but certainly not least, there's the social media associate. Especially over the last year, due to these unprecedented times, these friends have become more prevalent and often necessary. They are frequently available day or night to communicate your needs instantly via notifications or video chats, sharing life with them virtually. They can provide support, encouragement, and bonding even though they're not physically present.

True friends are often hard to find and keep. Choose wisely, and make every interaction count.



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