

## Older and Wiser: Social support found in sharing a meal

Quality social connections, better nutrition and higher life satisfaction can be derived from simply enjoying a meal socially

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Aug 4, 2024



Several organisations are setting up social meal and transportation projects for seniors.

Photo from Parkgate Society.

I think it is always great to have a meal with a friend, group of friends, partner or spouse in a social setting.

Just being out in a different environment from your home, in addition to being fun, provides many benefits and contributes to a healthy lifestyle.

Many older adults may find themselves eating alone because of retirement, loss of a spouse or partner and friends, and adult children moving away. Seniors may also find that cooking for one person is challenging and shopping may be difficult.

Some physiological changes may happen to our sense of smell and taste which may result in older people eating less thus affecting their nutritional needs. Older adults may begin to feel socially isolated and become nutritionally at risk because of these circumstances.

Eating with others periodically might be a solution to these issues. Several research studies have shown that eating with others can lead to healthy outcomes for older people.

The studies suggest that those who engage regularly in social meals feel happier, have higher life satisfaction, are more engaged, and have more friends they can depend on. These studies have shown that eating together in a somewhat structured setting can overcome, to an extent, risk factors associated with poor nutrition, social isolation and loneliness.

There are also other ways to have a social meal.

You could try asking a friend out for a meal or planning and serving a potluck at your place. If these ideas seem daunting, try finding and participating in community events and feasts or checking with your nearby senior's centre to see if they have meal programs.

For instance, you could go to a seniors' centre that prepares daily, nutritious hot meals, such as Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre and West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre.

Just being at these centres offers the opportunity to participate with other older adults in a social way. You may also find that you can connect to other programs offered such as bridge, arts and crafts, dancing and educational activities.

Many other North Shore organizations offer meals at different times of the week, such as Parkgate Community Services Society, North Shore Neighbourhood House, and North Shore Volunteers for Seniors, to name a few.

For other food service choices check out the new 2024 Seniors Directory put together by the North Shore Community Resources Society and published by the North Shore News. These can be found at most Seniors Centres.

Although the North Shore has been offering social meals with some transportation to those programs, funding has not met the increased need in the community.

The United Way of BC through the BC Ministry of Health is funding a Social Meals and Transportation program to enhance older people's well-being.

On the North Shore seven groups came together in a partnership to implement a social meal and transportation project.

These meals are starting this summer, and by September you will find that Parkgate, Family Services of the North Shore, North Shore Volunteers for Seniors and Capilano Community Services Society will be offering one of these programs regularly. Silver Harbour and Lionsview will provide the administration services to those programs.

Go out and have a meal with others, you'll feel great.

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