lexoshpejt

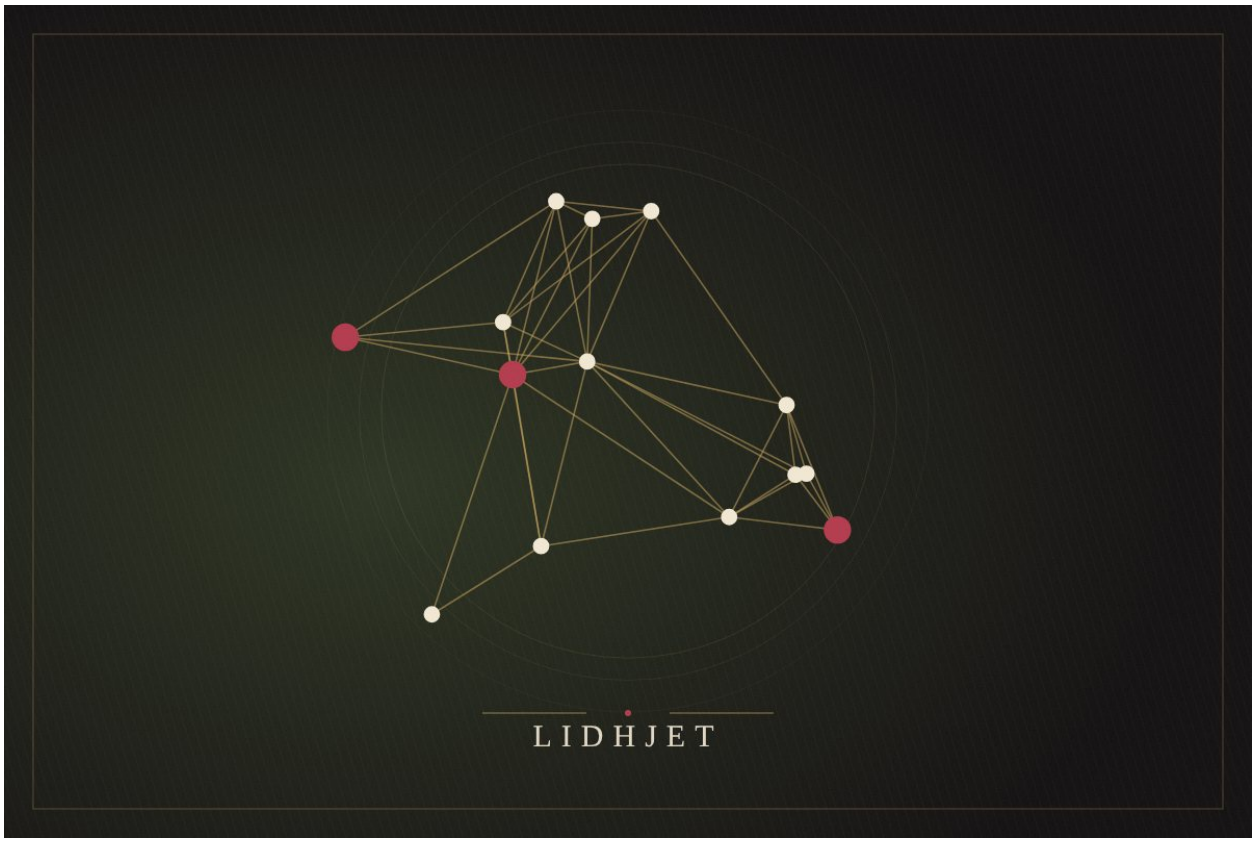
Body

Friends and longevity: what Julianne Holt-Lunstad's meta-analysis found

148 studies, over 300,000 people and a strong conclusion: social ties affect health as much as some well-known risk factors

3 November 2026 / 2 min read

Translated from the Albanian original by the editors.



Original illustration by the lexoshpejt editors. Not a historical photograph or object.

In many Albanian villages, older people used to sit every evening in front of their houses with the neighbours, or meet in the men's guest rooms. Today, with emigration and city life, many of them live alone. The question is not only emotional: does this affect their health too?

The 2010 meta-analysis

In 2010 the American psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad and her colleagues combined the results of 148 studies with 308,849 participants in total, followed for about 7.5 years on average. They measured how connected people were with others: whether they lived alone, how much social contact they had, how much support they felt.

The result: people with stronger social relationships were about **50 per cent more likely to be alive** at the end of the study period, compared with those with weaker relationships. The authors compared the size of this effect with that of well-known factors such as smoking, and noted that it was comparable to or greater than factors such as physical inactivity and obesity.

Care with interpretation

These were observational studies. People who are ill may have less social contact, and not only the reverse. Also, the comparisons with smoking are approximate. Even so, the effect remained after the researchers took into account age, sex and initial health, and similar findings have been confirmed by later studies on loneliness and isolation.

> *A conversation with a friend is not only time well spent. It may also be a quiet investment in health.*

How it might work

People with strong ties are more likely to get help when they are ill, to take better care of themselves and to cope better with stress. Prolonged loneliness, on the other hand, is linked with chronic stress, poorer sleep and less healthy behaviour.

How to strengthen your ties

1. **Call regularly** relatives who live far away, especially parents and grandparents.
2. **Create recurring meetings:** a coffee every week with the same friends, a walk with a neighbour.
3. **Become part of a group:** an association, a choir, a team, a volunteer group.
4. **Notice loneliness in others** and invite them. Often those who need it most do not ask.
5. **Quality matters.** A few deep relationships are worth more than many superficial contacts.

Sources

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B. & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*, 7(7), e1000316. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T. & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: A meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 227–237. doi:10.1177/1745691614568352

Read online: https://www.lexoshpejt.com/en/article/relationships-and-longevity