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SEEMS THE BEATLES HAD IT RIGHT...ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

What is the most essential ingredient of a fulfilling and healthy life? What are we all searching for as we engage in the frenetic pace of life? For many of us it is the feeling of belonging.

Social scientists refer to this internal need we all have to feel like we belong as social connectedness. Strangely, the term sounds awkward and kind of disjointed!

How can something so natural and essential to a health-filled life sound so complicated and unappealing? Perhaps it's because we have to be told by others that we need to introduce this quality into our daily lives and that makes us uncomfortable. Let's face it we already know we should be doing it but it's just not that easy and in some ways it seems to be getting harder.

Our communities have evolved to embrace cars and not people. Now we find we must look to the past in order to find what was good for us in the first place – like walkable neighbourhoods and access to nature.

The same can be said for connecting with others. We now embrace technology and independence not togetherness. To feel truly connected to others we may need to re-think our social (or unsocial) habits and replace them with meaningful face to face human connection and frankly that can feel awkward, risky and unnatural. But it doesn't have to be that way – we are designed for love – just ask the Beatles.

Social connectedness isn't as complicated as it sounds – it's about inviting someone over for morning coffee, going for a walk or looking for ways to help a neighbour or co-worker in need. If it's not that easy it may simply be that we have not exercised this muscle recently. Perhaps it's time to show people we like them by using our voices, lending a real hand and not just clicking a thumb!

There is a strong correlation between social connection (there's that word again) and physical health. According to the new provincial Planh health guide, belonging to social groups and networks is just as important in predicting health outcomes as diet and exercise.

Let's reintroduce friendliness, helpfulness, cooperation, and interdependence into our conversations and pastimes. It's good for our health and it's good for our communities.

For more information visit: <http://planh.ca/resources/action-guides/social-connectedness>

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