

Stay in touch



Every year on 30 July we celebrate International Day of Friendship.

This day was proclaimed in 2011 by the United Nations general assembly to encourage friendship among peoples, countries, cultures and individuals to build bridges between communities.

I am sure you have also, in the past two years (again) realised just how valuable friendship is for our own and society's wellbeing. This despite having been deprived by the pandemic of a vital part of being friends – physical closeness.

No number of WhatsApp messages, no Zoom coffee chat, absolutely no technologically mediated event can make up for a friend's hug, his pat on your back, taking your hand to say "Here I am". Not even social-distancing-get-together generate the warmth and corporeal closeness we had and need from friends.

While technology has definitely helped us continue our lives, both work and personal, over the last year and a half, combined with the Covid 19 pandemic the remoteness, isolation and hands-off nature of long-distance relationships have also created the perfect storm for **sensory deprivation** and a decline in our physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing.

Almost 25 years ago, social forecaster and author John Naisbitt coined the term "**high tech / high touch**" in his bestseller book by the same name. He uses this phrase to describe our ever-increasing reliance on technology and how we could minimise the detrimental effects of living, working, playing, escape even our search for meaning in an 'technologically intoxicated zone'. It is a phrase that has stayed with me ever since I first read the book as it reinforced my observations of human beings being forced to deny our embodied state and our innate postural pattern (up and out) by confining ourselves to a 1,5 cubic meter box furnished with a chair and a computer.

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More importantly, by disregarding ourselves our physicality, we escape into our heads. We end up paying very little attention to the nature and needs of our bodies.

But we are complex beings and all aspects of our being have to be integrated to ensure a quality life. Pretending for a long time that we are no more than minds connected to hands to convey our thoughts to screen, is unsustainable. The physical, emotional and social parts of our being will not be ignored. Just because culture has changed does not mean our physiology formed over millennia, has changed.

And as Naisbitt foresaw, the more we escape into our heads, the greater our need for visceral, body experiences. Just look at how modern humans spend their leisure time – sport, exercise, cooking and eating, massage, bath products, dancing, high risk sports, etc. This way of life is the direct result of industrial revolution in Europe and Britain and which spread all over the world thanks to colonialisation.

Before this physical hard work required daily prolonged and varied movement; sitting doing the same thing day after day in a factory, well not so much. This combined with two other social constructions from that era namely leisure time on Saturday and Sunday (the idea of a weekend is a fairly recent phenomenon in the Western culture) and organised sport have shaped our world.

As time went by and television and other technology developed, instead of participating more and more people became long distance viewers of physical activity. Instead of playing football, or even attending the game, we ended up sitting at home watching it on television. We have merely exchanged our office box for one of the same size at home.

But our need for sensory experiences have not disappeared, high tech feeds our yearning for high touch. And then came Covid 19 and all the things we have been doing to break out of the tech bubble becomes taboo. More than ever we are confined up to our boxes - no *kuier*-ing, no sharing a meal, no gym, no shopping, no anything, it feels like.

Day by day we feel more detached from our bodies, from other people and from the rest of the world. It leaves us feeling alone and unsupported as the social isolation causes us to lose the most basic way of showing care – the human touch. It deprives of hugs, holding a hand, a gentle pat on the shoulder even sitting close to one another. We are untouched during celebrations and during sad times. Even when in the same room it can make us feel far away from our family, our friends, our people. It is a deep-seated



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loss of a basic human need of closeness, mentally and physically.

How do we jump this chasm without compromising the health of ourselves and our friends?

With the **International Day of Friendship** I thought of a plan. If I can't physically touch my friend, I can touch her heart and I can touch her heart with a touchy-feely something to stimulate her tactile perception. How about putting together a **sensory basket** with things and acts of service that will touch her heart (and yours) such as:

- Massage oil
- Fidget toys
- Sensory balls
- Adult colouring-in book and crayons
- A **sensory brush**- a soft surgical brush to provide stimulation to the skin.
- Giving her a hand and foot massage
- Giving her a pedicure and manicure
- Knitting or crocheting her a scarf or beanie or soft fluffy blanket made from soft, fluffy yarn
- Teaching her to knit or crochet
- Lotions and oils
- Comfy socks
- Making her a beanbag to put over eyes when resting.
- Giving her a list of You Tube stretch videos or an app and then join her in doing the stretches.
- Bath products
- Art supplies and clay
- Inviting him /her to a meal of dishes that require eating with your hands or unusual utensils like chop sticks.
- Making up a bag of small objects, some of which are listed above and get her to feel what it is before taking it out. By the way, that is how we were trained to enhance our tactile awareness skills as massage therapists. It is also a lot of fun.

Keep well and keep in touch

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