

The Trick to Keeping Friends as We Get Older

November 28, 2018

Two or three times a week, Alan J. Fink, 64, the owner and manager of a box business in Baltimore, listens as his mother wishes out loud that she had good friends to go out with.

That is worrisome for his mother, who is 88—and for himself.

“I don’t want to be in her position in another 20 years,” Mr. Fink says. He frets that his circle of friends should be wider, “so that, down the pike, we’ll all be available to each other—if and when we need each other.”

A growing body of data confirms that friends are essential to our medical, psychological and social well-being as we age. Yet many people find it difficult to maintain their circles of friends as they grow older.

Studies have shown close friends can go a long time without seeing one another often and still feel close, says Laura Carstensen, professor of psychology and public policy at the Stanford Center on Longevity. The feelings of closeness revive once the friends get together again.