

Relocation later in life and contact frequency with friends: Do contact modes matter?

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When older adults move to a new location far from their residence, their friends should not expect too many telephone calls or visits, according to a new University of Michigan study.

U-M researchers examined changes in the frequencies of in-person, telephone and written or email contact with [friends](#) among older adults who move short or longer distances.

The findings, which appear in *Research on Aging*, suggest that the impact of relocation on contact frequency exists even though [communication technology](#) gives older adults flexibility in maintaining frequent contact with their friends.

Multiple studies document the importance of social support from [family members](#) and friends in promoting the [physical health](#), [mental health](#), and well-being of [older adults](#).

"Keeping contact with long-time friends continues to be important after age 50," said Joonyoung Cho, the study's lead author and doctoral student in social work/psychology. "Indeed, ongoing research suggests that contact with friends provides different benefits for personal well-being."

A nationally representative sample of 3,820 adults aged 50 years or older came from the Health and Retirement Study. They were asked about their contact with friends through different modes of communication.

In-person contact frequency, according to the findings, was most sensitive to distance, making it more challenging when individuals were separated by long distance.

Telephone contact frequency was only impacted by long-distance moves. Cho said several factors influence this mode of communication,

including that both individuals need to have the equipment. In addition, it takes two people to make and pick up a call, he said.

"The friend may have also moved to a different country or time zone. Or, if the friend was older, he/she may have hearing difficulties, be impaired physically, have dementia, or deceased," Cho said.

People who move also often invest in making new friends with others who live nearby, he said.

Email contact [frequency](#) was not influenced by distance, the study indicated.

Cho and study co-author Jacqui Smith, professor of psychology and research professor at the U-M Institute for Social Research, admit that the data, which was collected eight years ago, might be different with current technology (new apps developed for smartphones to provide visual contact with others) and during the pandemic.

More information: Joonyoung Cho et al, Relocation Later in Life and Contact Frequency With Friends: Do Contact Modes Matter?, *Research on Aging* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/01640275221126103](https://doi.org/10.1177/01640275221126103)

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