

THE BENEFITS OF BEING KIND

Studies show it really can be “better to give than to receive”



If you've received a cup of coffee or a fast-food meal that was paid for by the driver ahead of you in a drive-through line, you know that random acts of kindness can make you smile and improve your day.

What you may not know is that the person who paid for your smile also benefitted—perhaps even more than you did. Kindness—whether a random act or not—has been shown to: increase self-esteem, empathy, and compassion; improve moods and relationships; and decrease anxiety and stress, according to the Mayo Clinic.¹ Kindness can also increase and improve your connections with others, which can boost your mood and reduce loneliness or feelings of isolation.

Being kind raises the good, lowers the bad

The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation reports that engaging in acts of kindness offers the following benefits:²

- **It increases oxytocin, also known as the love hormone.**³ Oxytocin helps lower blood pressure, improves overall heart health, and increases self-esteem and optimism.
- **It increases energy levels.** In one study, about half of the participants said they feel stronger and more energetic after helping others, and many also reported they feel calmer and less depressed.⁴
- **It increases happiness.** According to a 2010 Harvard Business School survey in 136 countries, the people who were found to be altruistic (based on charitable donations and other contributions) were happiest overall.
- **It increases lifespans.** People 55 and older who volunteer for more than one organization are 44% less likely to die early—and that's after sifting out other contributing factors, such as physical health, gender, exercise, marital status, habits such as smoking, and more.⁴
- **It provides pleasure.** Research from Emory University indicates that your brain's pleasure and reward centers light up when you are kind to another person—a phenomenon known as the “helper's high.”
- **It boosts serotonin levels and helps ward off disease.**⁵ Kindness stimulates the production of serotonin, which helps to calm you down, heal your wounds, and make you happier.
- **It reduces pain.** Engaging in acts of kindness produces endorphins, which block the perception of pain and increase feelings of wellbeing.
- **It reduces stress.** The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation reports that perpetually kind people have 23% less cortisol (the stress hormone), and age more slowly than the average population.
- **It reduces anxiety.** A study by the University of British Columbia⁶ involved 115 socially anxious undergraduate students who were divided into groups. One group was assigned to perform at least six acts of kindness a week. After one month, this group saw a significant increase in positive moods, relationship satisfaction—as well as a decrease in social avoidance.
- **It reduces depression.** Studies show that when we give of ourselves, our physical and mental health improves.
- **It lowers blood pressure.** Because committing acts of kindness releases the hormone oxytocin—also known as a “cardioprotective hormone”—it lowers blood pressure and helps protect our heart.

Ideas for spreading kindness to others – and to yourself!

As you might expect, the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation has a [lot of ideas](#) of ways to spread kindness—too many to include here. But, here are a few to get you started:

- Be a friend to a lonely neighbor.
- Celebrate important days with those you love.
- Visit the nearest little free library and donate a book.
- Be a good listener.
- Create positive bookmarks and hide them at your local library.
- Share your favorite book with someone.
- Be kind to your server.
- Have a judgment-free day.
- Compliment with reckless abandon.
- Sign up to be an organ donor.
- Help a senior tidy up.
- Leave quarters at the laundromat or a vending machine.
- Leave snacks and refreshments for delivery drivers.

If you need a little more motivation, the Mayo Clinic has a monthlong program called [Kickstart Kindness](#) to help people spread their kindness—and discover the benefits.

Be kind to yourself too

It's also important to be kind to yourself! Invest in your interests, practice mindfulness, take a break from negative thoughts, and become your own coach or cheerleader. For more ideas on ways to be kind to yourself, visit PsychCentral to read "[18 Ways to be Kind to Yourself and Why It Matters.](#)"

¹ <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/wellness/kindness>

² <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/the-science-of-kindness>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/24/science/24angier.html?r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss>

⁴ Christine Carter, UC Berkeley, Greater Good Science Center

⁵ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-the-face-adversity/201211/practicing-acts-kindness>

⁶ <https://psych.ubc.ca/news/kindness-may-help-socially-anxious-people-relax-says-new-research-by-dr-lynn-alden/>

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