

December 2021 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames Kindness Benefits Our Health

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” Aesop, Ancient Greek Storyteller

Kindness can be acts of being friendly, generous, and considerate to family, friends, and strangers. A smile towards others can mean kindness. Kindness includes goodwill, warmth, tenderness, selflessness, and benevolence.

How does kindness benefit our health? Researchers delving into the relationship between kindness and health suggest that there is “a science behind that phenomenon called “loving kindness.” Learning and practicing loving kindness can profoundly affect a person’s attitude, outlook, and health.

Why? How? The act of helping others activates the part of the brain that makes people feel pleasure. It releases a hormone called oxytocin that helps modulate social interactions and emotion — the higher the oxytocin levels, the more likely people may help others. Studies have shown kindness can reduce stress and anxiety. “Those who regularly participate in acts of kindness have been shown to have 23% less cortisol. Cortisol is the stress hormone and increased levels can be so detrimental to your hormonal health and longevity.” It has been shown that being kind increases happiness. “Happy hormones” (serotonin and oxytocin), are released when participating in kindness. Oxytocin also helps reduce inflammation. Other studies report that kindness releases dopamine, serotonin, and endogenous opioids. These hormones are associated to being happy.

Various researchers focused on volunteering as an example of a form kindness. Data collected on people who volunteer show they are more likely to live longer than those who don’t report volunteering. A “University of Berkley study found that seniors who volunteered regularly for 2 or more organizations had a 44% lower likelihood of dying during the course of the study. Some research suggests volunteering only increases your life span if your motivation is to help others”. According to Mayo Clinic staff, health benefits of practicing “loving-kindness meditation (LKM) include: reduced pain and tension from migraines, reduced symptoms of depression, and possibly slowing the aging process. “Studies have found that women who practice LKM have longer telomeres, which are like little end-caps on your DNA. Shorter telomeres have been associated with faster aging.”

Examples of doing acts of kindness: Intentionally setting a goal to be kinder to others. Expressing sincerely felt kindness to a co-worker or co-volunteer. Making a special effort to extend kind words to a neighbor. Holding the elevator for someone. Taking time to help a friend or loved one. Practicing loving-kindness meditation. “As you spread your kindness, you might just experience what research has confirmed: Generosity can be contagious.” The kinder you act toward others, the better you will feel. Kindness is lasting! Kindness is contagious! Be kind to yourself! It benefits your health, too!

Sources: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/how-sharing-kindness-can-make-you-healthier-happier/art-203900> <https://www.thewellnessway.com/healthy-benefits-of-kindness/#:~:text=5%20Healthy%20Benefits%20of%20Kindness%201%20Reduces%20Stress,...%204%>
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