

November 2023

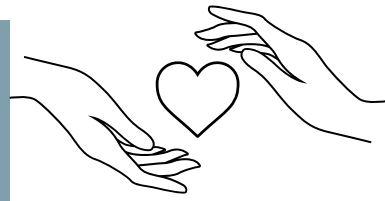
Healthy Lifestyles

THE SCIENCE OF *kindness*



The practice of paying it forward

November is known as the 'Month of Giving', and is often associated with prompts to give back and help uplift members of our community who could use a helping hand. There is even a day commemorated for this special occasion, known as 'Giving Tuesday', which falls on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving. So it got me thinking, what motivates us as humans to be so generous and kind? What does it mean to be kind? How is kindness extended? Whom is kindness extended to? And how does kindness affect our health and wellness?



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Annie is very passionate about the subjects of health and wellness, and cares deeply about helping people of all backgrounds. She believes in making the world a better place for everyone in it, and is a fierce advocate for equity and self empowerment. She believes that knowledge is power, especially in regards to health and wellness. Annie holds bachelor's degrees from the University of Utah in Health Promotion and Education and in Spanish, and is a Certified Health Education Specialist. Annie is currently working toward a degree in Nursing at Salt Lake Community College.

Perhaps kindness is a more charitable form of giving back, such as donating goods or volunteering time with those less fortunate in your community. Is it paying it forward, acting on moments of inspiration and generosity to aid a stranger, such as paying for their meal or letting them take your seat on a crowded bus? Or maybe it is simply a compassionate and altruistic way of living, one that selflessly considers the wellbeing and happiness of others. Regardless of how it is defined, learning to be kind is one of our earliest and most valuable life lessons.

Psychologists have found that generosity and acts of kindness have been linked to increased happiness and improved well-being, and have even been associated with physical effects such as improving heart health. Being kind can lower blood pressure and levels of the body's stress hormone - cortisol. Some cortisol in the body is good, and even necessary to a certain level. However, chronically high levels of cortisol have systemic effects that have been associated with worse health outcomes, such as systemic inflammation that has been linked to some chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

While being kind has not only been linked to a decrease in negative health outcomes, it has also been scientifically proven to boost levels of serotonin and dopamine, giving us that rush of 'happy hormones' to reinforce the good behavior and kind actions. Dopamine and serotonin are neurotransmitters in the brain that activate the dopamine reward pathway, which cause the pleasure and reward centers in your brain to light up, and give you feelings of satisfaction, fulfillment, and well-being. Our brains associate activation of this pathway with positive emotions, incentivizing us to repeat the actions to achieve the positive feelings again. Another 'happiness hormone' that is released is oxytocin, which is a neurotransmitter known for its role in promoting a sense of bonding. Oxytocin is sometimes referred to as the 'love hormone', because it is known to be released during childbirth, breastfeeding, intimate acts, or simply giving someone a good hug.



"Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can."
— John Wesley



Whether it's a small act of kindness, such as holding the door for a stranger, or a grand gesture such as helping a friend move, all generosity has an impact on the brain. However, some acts of kindness can be more beneficial than others. Direct acts of kindness, or generosity spread in person, increases the opportunity for and benefits of social connectedness, which has its own positive impacts on our health and well-being. Being kind can increase your sense of connection with others, which in turn can enhance relationships and decrease feelings of loneliness. Studies have also shown that when an individual chooses to make an act of kindness, rather than being required to, they reap more benefits from the positive impact.

Donate to Meals on Wheels @ SLCo



Learn how SLCo supports homebound seniors in our community - and how you can get involved to support getting nutritious meals into their homes!

There's also this phenomenon that happens when we observe kind acts in everyday situations. Spontaneous generosity among strangers is socially contagious - meaning when you witness a random act of kindness, you are more likely to initiate a random act of kindness for a stranger yourself. This snowball effect of kindness inspiration is often known as paying it forward. These random acts of kindness have been known to start chain reactions of paying it forward - such as paying for the meal for the next car in a drive-thru, prompting the next car to pay for the following car, and so on and so on. These chain reactions of paying it forward have been documented on numerous occasions. A single act of kindness at a Dairy Queen in Minnesota in 2020 initiated a snowball effect of paying for the next car that lasted for nearly 3 days and ended with a record of over 900 participating cars. Do not be deterred if your simple act of paying it forward doesn't start a chain reaction, at least that you can see. Studies have shown that even simply witnessing a kind act has positive side effects, including increasing self-esteem, compassion, empathy, and improving mood.

Donate to Animal Services @ SLCo



Learn how SLCo provides safe, humane, and compassionate care to shelter animals and how you can get involved to support our furry friends!

So how do we learn how to be kind? Is it inherent to being human? It's important to learn how to be kind while we're young - both to the world around us as well as to ourselves. The world we live in today is highly competitive - and while some of that may be spurred on by capitalism and the constant drive for success and productivity - a lot of it comes from us constantly comparing ourselves to others, and subsequently putting ourselves down when our journey or success doesn't look the same as someone else's. And while we as adults may have normalized our special brand of negative self-talk over the years, we didn't always used to be this way. As humans, one of the primary ways we learn behaviors is through observation, and as children we are like sponges absorbing everything in our vicinity, taking it in and internalizing it - unable to fully discern whether the behaviors we are internalizing are positive or negative. Negative self-talk, or speaking unkindly to ourselves, is unfortunately one of those behaviors we may pick up at a young age.

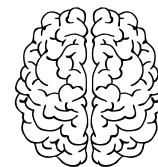


*Be Kind
To Your Mind*

If you find yourself being your own worst critic most days, perhaps take some time to self-reflect on the way you speak to yourself and see if there's an opportunity to turn your self-talk around and be more positive. A few simple rules to start - Do not say anything to yourself that you would not say to anyone else, or that you would not want someone else to say to you. Give yourself grace and compassion for all you are doing. Do not tear yourself down over things that you cannot control - like the economy, politics, or other people's thoughts and opinions. At the end of the day, your relationship with yourself is the most important one you will ever have - so make sure you are showing up for yourself in the ways that you need support, love, compassion, and understanding.



Learn to be kind to your mind



Here are a few examples of how we can turn negative self-talk into self-love.

Instead of saying...

"I've never done this before and don't know how. What's the point in even trying?"

"It's too complicated, I'll never figure it out."

"I've been doing it this way for years. It's too difficult for me to change how I do things now."

"I'm not good at this and I'm not going to get any better."

"I'm not skinny/pretty/fit/smart/funny enough."

"I am so fat/ugly/dumb/awkward."

"I'm not trying hard enough. I need to try harder and do more."

Try saying...

"This is an opportunity to learn something new. It's OK if I'm not good at it right away."

"I can tackle this from a different angle."

"Change is uncomfortable at first but it's a good opportunity to grow. Let's take a chance."

"It's OK if I'm not good at it right away. I will get better at it if I try."

"I have worked hard to become the person that I am, and I am good enough."

"I am not feeling my best right now, but that's OK because I know that nothing is forever."

"I am doing my best, and my best is enough."

So whether you are hoping to change the way you interact with the world around you or the way you interact with yourself, everyone deserves a little kindness. So give yourself some grace, try to lend a helping hand, tell your friends you love them, and let's all do our parts to make the world a little brighter.

"How do we change the world? One random act of kindness at a time."
— Morgan Freeman

