



Science of Kindness / Frequently Asked Questions

What does RAK mean by the “science” behind kindness?

Practicing kindness is more than just a nice thing to do; it’s also beneficial to overall well-being.

Is there actual proof that kindness improves society?

Yes, kindness is scientifically proven to boost health, happiness and societal goodwill.

Can kindness be taught?

Yes! Kindness, like physical and academic skills, appears to be something that is not fixed, but rather can be enhanced with training and practice.

- A researcher from the University of Wisconsin says, “It’s kind of like weight training, we found that people can actually build up their compassion ‘muscle’ and respond to others’ suffering with care and a desire to help.”
- “Compassion and kindness training in schools can help children learn to be attuned to their own emotions as well as those of others, which may decrease bullying. Compassion training also may benefit people who have social challenges such as social anxiety or antisocial behavior.”
— Richie Davidson, Neuroscientist and Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Can kindness really elicit change, and how?

Yes, because kindness is contagious.

- **Acts of kindness have a positive three-way effect:** There’s the positive effect on the recipient, and the positive effect on you—you might find yourself experiencing the positive emotion of the ‘helper’s high.’ But perhaps the biggest effect of all will be on a passer-by who just happens to witness the act.

How can kindness improve your health?

- **Volunteering results in more health benefits than exercising or quitting smoking.** “Helping a neighbor, volunteering, or donating goods and services results in a *helper’s high*.” — Stephen Post, Author, “The Hidden Gifts of Helping”.
- **People who volunteer live a longer more satisfied life.** “People who volunteer tend to experience fewer aches and pains. Giving help to others protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease. People 55 and older who volunteer for two or more organizations have an impressive 44% lower likelihood of dying, and that’s after sifting out every other contributing factor, including physical health, exercise, gender, habits like smoking, marital status and many more. This is a stronger effect than exercising four times a week or going to church.” — Christine Carter, Author, “Raising Happiness; In Pursuit of Joyful Kids and Happier Parents”.



- **Giving to others reduces depression and improves well-being.** Stephen Post of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine serves as president of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, which conducts and funds research on altruism, compassion and service. [His research shows](#) that when we give of ourselves, especially if we start young, everything from life satisfaction to self-realization and physical health is significantly improved. Mortality is delayed, depression is reduced and well-being and good fortune are increased.
- **Committing acts of kindness lowers blood pressure.** [According to Dr. David R. Hamilton](#), acts of kindness create emotional warmth, which releases a hormone known as oxytocin. Oxytocin causes the release of a chemical called nitric oxide, which dilates the blood vessels. This reduces blood pressure and, therefore, oxytocin is known as a "cardioprotective" hormone. It protects the heart by lowering blood pressure.
- **Helping others increases energy.** "About half of participants in one study report that they feel stronger and more energetic after helping others; many also reported feeling calmer and less depressed, with increased feelings of self-worth." — Christine Carter, UC Berkeley, Greater Good Science Center.
- **Doing kind acts for others reduces anxiety.** During four weeks, University of British Columbia researchers assigned people with high levels of anxiety to do kind acts for other people at least six times a week. The researchers found that doing nice things for people led to a significant increase in people's positive moods. It also led to an increase in relationship satisfaction and a decrease in social avoidance in socially anxious individuals.

How can kindness increase happiness?

- "People who engage in kind acts become happier over time...When you are kind to others, you feel good as a person -- more moral, optimistic, and positive." —Sonja Lyubomirsky, Professor of Psychology, UC Riverside.
- Researcher Elizabeth Dunn found that those who spend money on others reported much greater happiness than those who spend it on themselves.
- The act of helping another person triggers activity in the caudate nucleus and anterior cingulate cortex regions of the brain, the parts involved in pleasure and reward. That is, serving others may produce the same sort of pleasure as gratifying a personal desire.

How can kindness build good will?

- "Kindness can jumpstart a cascade of positive social consequences. Helping others leads people to like you, appreciate you, to offer gratitude. It also may lead people to reciprocate in your times of need. Helping others can satisfy a basic human need for connecting with others, winning you smiles, thankfulness, and valued friendship." —Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D., professor of psychology, University of California, Riverside.