

Cedars-Sinai Blog

The Science of Kindness

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Science says: Random acts of kindness are good for your health.

The warm feeling of wellbeing that washes over you when you've done something kind isn't just in your head.

It's in your brain chemicals, too.

Acts of kindness can release hormones that contribute to your mood and overall wellbeing. The practice is so effective it's being formally incorporated into some types of psychotherapy.

"We all seek a path to happiness," says [Dr. Waguih William IsHak](https://bio.cedars-sinai.org/ishakw/index.html) (<https://bio.cedars-sinai.org/ishakw/index.html>), a professor of [psychiatry](https://www.cedars-sinai.org/programs/psychiatry.html) ([/programs/psychiatry.html](https://www.cedars-sinai.org/programs/psychiatry.html)) at Cedars-Sinai. "Practicing kindness toward others is one we know works."

'The trick you need to know: Acts of kindness have to be repeated. Biochemically, you can't live on the 3-to-4-minute oxytocin boost that comes from a single act.' ([https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/science-of-kindness.html&text='The%20trick%20you%20need%20to%20know%3A%20Acts%20of%20kindness%20have%20to%20to-4-minute%20oxytocin%20boost%20that%20comes%20from%20a%20single%20act.'](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/science-of-kindness.html&text='The%20trick%20you%20need%20to%20know%3A%20Acts%20of%20kindness%20have%20to%20to-4-minute%20oxytocin%20boost%20that%20comes%20from%20a%20single%20act.'&via=cedarssinai&related=cedarssina)&via=cedarssinai&related=cedarssina

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Kindness is chemical

Most research on the science behind why kindness makes us feel better has centered around oxytocin.

Sometimes called "the love hormone," oxytocin plays a role in forming social bonds and trusting other people. It's the hormone mothers produce when they breastfeed, cementing their bond with their babies.

Oxytocin is also released when we're physically intimate. It's tied to making us more trusting, more generous, and friendlier, while also lowering our blood pressure.

Acts of kindness can also give our love hormone levels a boost, research suggests.

Dr. IsHak says studies have also linked random acts of kindness to releasing dopamine, a chemical messenger in the brain that can give us a feeling of euphoria. This feel-good brain chemical is credited with causing what's known as a "helper's high."

In addition to boosting oxytocin and dopamine, being kind can also increase serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps regulate mood.

"We're building better selves and better communities at the same time."

Kindness as a treatment for pain, depression, and anxiety

What we know about the science behind acts of kindness is influencing how we treat certain health conditions, Dr. IsHak says.

Studies are investigating if oxytocin can be beneficial in treating some conditions. The hormone is a protein and cannot simply be taken as a pill. It's being studied in injection and nasal spray forms.

Mindfulness-based therapy is becoming increasingly popular for treating depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions. The therapy is built on [mindfulness meditation \(/blog/mindfulness-meditation-soothes-patients-and-providers-alike.html\)](#), documenting your gratitude, and acts of kindness. People being treated in a mindfulness-based therapy program incorporate acts of kindness into their daily routines.

Helping others is also believed to increase levels of an endorphin-like chemical in the body called substance P, which can relieve pain, Dr. IsHak says.

Read: [Study: Seniors Benefit from Depression Treatment as Much as Younger Patients \(/blog/depression-in-the-elderly-is-common-and-treatable.html\)](#)

Put kindness on repeat

The good news is that a simple act of kindness can reward our bodies and minds with feel-good chemical substances.

However, the effect isn't lasting. A single act of kindness isn't going to carry you through several days—or even hours.

"The trick you need to know: Acts of kindness have to be repeated," Dr. IsHak says.

"Biochemically, you can't live on the 3-to-4-minute oxytocin boost that comes from a single act."

That's why kindness is most beneficial as a practice—something we work into our daily routine whether in the form of volunteer work, dropping coins into an expired parking meter, bringing a snack to share with your officemates, or holding the elevator for someone.

"The rewards of acts of kindness are many," says Dr. IsHak. "They help us feel better and they help those who receive them. We're building better selves and better communities at the same time."

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