

# LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/DAY** | Duration: **7 MINS**

## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Practicing kindness is one of the most direct routes to happiness: Research suggests that kind people tend to be more satisfied with their relationships and with their lives in general. We all have a natural capacity for kindness, but sometimes we don't take steps to nurture and express this capacity as much as we could.

Loving-kindness meditation (sometimes called “metta” meditation) is a great way to cultivate our propensity for kindness. It involves mentally sending goodwill, kindness, and warmth towards others by silently repeating a series of mantras.

## TIME REQUIRED

7 minutes daily

## HOW TO DO IT

This practice draws on a guided meditation created by Eve Ekman Ph.D., LCSW, senior fellow at the Greater Good Science Center.

We recommend listening to the audio of this guided meditation in the player below. We have included a script of the practice to help you follow it yourself or teach it to others.

### Body Position

For this practice, it's especially important that we find a comfortable position. This may be easiest lying down or seated.

To help us focus and gain some initial stability, let's bring our attention and awareness to the breath at the belly. Inhale, noticing sensations of breath. Exhale, noticing sensations of breath, as the belly rises and falls.

[30 seconds of silence]

### Receiving Loving-Kindness

We'll now shift into this practice of joy, by bringing to mind someone who we really believe has our best interests in their heart. Someone who has extended kindness and support to us. This could be someone we know now or someone from the past. A friend, family member, teacher, colleague.

Choose just one person and bring them to mind as though they were seated right in front of you. Smiling at you.

Imagine them truly wishing for you to be happy, fulfilled. For you to have a life that is flourishing. Imagine them beaming this towards you in their smile, in their eyes. And with your next breaths, inhale and draw in that intention of goodness.

In meditation and visualization practices, we have an opportunity to generate positive emotional states right here and now that we might experience in the world were this person really next to us. Simply through our mind and imagination, it's as though we can call upon this valuable resource right here, right now. So for a couple more breaths, really take in this wish of well, happiness, joy from this person who cherishes us.

[15 seconds of silence]

### **Sending Loving-Kindness to Loved Ones**

Now letting go of the image of this person, notice if in the body there is any emotional residue. Feelings of warmth or goodness. Ways we can identify what it's like to receive this wish of happiness. Then relax into these sensations and feelings for just a couple breaths.

[15 seconds of silence]

With this feeling of support and happiness, we can now extend this boost of joy to others. Bring to mind someone in your life who could really use an extra boost—a friend, family member, or colleague. And, again, bring them to mind vividly as though they were right in front of you.

And without too many stories, or thoughts, or ideas—just call upon this experience of wishing this person to be truly happy, fulfilled, joyful. As you inhale, draw in this intention. And as you exhale, wish this person happiness, fulfillment, flourishing.

Twice more—inhale, drawing in this intention. And then exhale, sending out.

[15 seconds of silence]

Release the image of this person. And once again, just notice the sensations in your own body associated with wishing someone else well, generating and extending joy.

Let's bring this practice to a close with three long inhales and three long exhales.

## **EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS**

Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). [Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95, 1045-1062.

People who practiced Loving-Kindness Meditation daily for seven weeks reported a steady increase in their daily experience of positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, contentment, hope, and love. They also reported greater life satisfaction and lower depressive symptoms following the intervention, compared to when they started. People who were on a waitlist to learn the practice didn't report these benefits.

### **Who Has Tried The Practice?**

Participants in the above study were mostly white, held bachelor's degrees, and had a median annual income of over \$85,000. Additional research has engaged members of other groups:

- [Israeli adults](#) who attended seven 90-minute weekly classes on Loving-Kindness Meditation and were asked to practice daily “showed significant reductions in self-criticism and depressive symptoms as well as significant increases in self-compassion and positive emotions” compared to those on a waitlist.
- For [university freshmen in China](#), 30 minutes of Loving-Kindness Meditation three times a week for four weeks enhanced positive emotions, decreased negative emotions, and improved interpersonal interactions.
- [Singaporean individuals](#) with clinically significant symptoms of borderline personality disorder showed reduced negative emotions and feelings of rejection after 10 minutes of Loving-Kindness Meditation.

- [Japanese individuals](#) increased in self-compassion and decreased in negative thoughts and emotions after a seven-week program that included Loving-Kindness Meditation, [Mindful Breathing](#), and self-compassion exercises.
- [University students in South Korea](#) experienced reductions in self-criticism and psychological distress, along with improvements in self-reassurance and mental health, after participating in a six-week program that included Loving-Kindness Meditation, [Body Scan](#), and [Mindful Breathing](#).
- [Female trauma survivors of interpersonal violence](#) (41% non-white) in an American substance abuse treatment and housing program experienced significant reductions in mental health symptoms across a six-week meditation program that included two weeks of Loving-Kindness Meditation for an hour every day.
- [Arabic- and Bangla-speaking migrants](#) in Australia experienced reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress after a bilingual group mindfulness program that included Loving-Kindness Meditation, [Body Scan](#), and [Mindful Breathing](#).

Loving-Kindness Meditation is one of the practices included in [Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction](#) (MBSR). Developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and based on [Buddhist teachings](#), MBSR is a six- to 10-week program that teaches various mindfulness techniques through weekly sessions and homework assignments. Research suggests that MBSR benefits the mental health of various groups, including the following:

- People in different cultures and countries, such as bilingual [Latin-American families](#), university students in [China](#), disadvantaged families in [Hong Kong](#), low-income cyclo drivers in [Vietnam](#), males with generalized anxiety disorder in [Iran](#), Indigenous people in the [Republic of Congo](#), and [Aboriginal Australians](#).
- Women around the world, including [pregnant women](#) in China, [rural women](#) in India who experienced still-birth, [at-risk women](#) in Iran, [Muslim women college students](#) in the United Arab Emirates, American [survivors of intimate partner violence](#), and socioeconomically disadvantaged [Black women](#) with post-traumatic stress disorder.
- People with certain diseases, such as New Zealanders with [rheumatoid arthritis](#), male patients with [heart disease](#) in India, patients with [diabetes](#) in South Korea, [cancer](#) patients in Canada, [breast cancer](#) survivors in China, and HIV-positive individuals in [Toronto](#), [San Francisco](#), [Iran](#), and [South Africa](#).

More research is needed to explore whether, and how, the impact of this practice extends to other groups and cultures.

## WHY TO TRY IT

Loving-kindness meditation increases happiness in part by making people feel more connected to others—to loved ones, acquaintances, and even strangers. Research suggests that when people practice loving-kindness meditation regularly, they start automatically reacting more positively to others—and their social interactions and close relationships become more satisfying. Loving-kindness meditation can also reduce people’s focus on themselves—which can, in turn, lower symptoms of anxiety and depression.

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

