RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Difficulty: MODERATE | Frequency: 1X/DAY | Duration: 10 MINS

❌ WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

We all perform acts of kindness at one time or another. These acts may be large or small, and their beneficiaries may not even be aware of them. Yet their effects can be profound—not only on the recipient but on the giver, as well. This exercise asks you to perform five acts of kindness in one day as a way of cultivating feelings of kindness and happiness in yourself, so that you can extend kindness to your local community and the world.

TIME REQUIRED

Varies depending on your acts of kindness. Could be anywhere from several minutes to several hours.

HOW TO DO IT

One day this week, perform five acts of kindness—all five in one day. It doesn't matter if the acts are big or small, but it is more powerful if you perform a variety of acts.

The acts do not need to be for the same person—the person doesn't even have to be aware of them. Examples include feeding a stranger's parking meter, picking up litter, helping a friend with a chore, or providing a meal to a person in need.

After each act, write down what you did in at least one or two sentences; for more of a happiness boost, also write down how it made you feel.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology, 9*(2), 111-131.

People who performed five acts of kindness every week for six weeks saw a significant boost in happiness, but only if they performed their five acts in a single day rather than spread out over each week. This may be because many acts of kindness are small, so spreading them out might make them harder to remember and savor.

Who Has Tried The Practice?

While there is no demographic information in the study above, additional studies explore how this exercise benefits other groups and cultures:

- After reviewing 10 studies testing this exercise, a 2018 review suggests that the overall effect of kindness on well-being is not significantly influenced by sex, age, or type of participant.
- A 2014 study also found that Random Acts of Kindness "worked equally well regardless of participants' gender, age, or education."
- Male Chinese prisoners who were asked to perform three acts of kindness daily for six weeks significantly improved in well-being compared to those who did not.

- Female middle school students in Hong Kong who performed online acts of kindness increased in self-esteem and social self-efficacy.
- Japanese people who counted their own acts of kindness for one week became more happy, kind, and grateful.
- South Koreans and Americans similarly increased in well-being when performing kind acts in a 2013 study. However, the benefits may depend on how the practice is framed. For example, a 2019 study found that Americans who performed acts of kindness increased in well-being even more when they focused on the personal benefits of the practice compared to the benefits to others, although this was not true for South Koreans.

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

WHY TO TRY IT

Researchers believe this practice makes you feel happier because it makes you think more highly of yourself and become more aware of positive social interactions. It may also increase your kind, helpful attitudes and tendencies toward others in your family or your community. Evidence suggests that variety is key: There's a risk that kindness can start to feel routine, so it helps to approach it with a spirit of curiosity, always looking for new ways to express your care and kindness and looking for new people to help.

SOURCES

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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.