

A [newly published review](#) of decades of kindness research provides some answers. In this paper, researchers analysed the results from 126 research articles looking at almost 200,000 participants from around the world. The studies they chose all had to meet certain criteria, such as including only adults and reporting good statistical data; some were experiments, where people did a kindness practice to observe its effects, while others just surveyed people about how kind and happy they were. The studies measured well-being in a variety of ways, including both mental and physical health.

As expected, people who were kind tended to have higher well-being. Lead researcher Bryant Hui was surprised the relationship was not stronger than it was, but he was still encouraged by the results.

“Although the overall relationship between prosocial (kind and helpful) behaviour and well-being is weak, given that so many people around the world act prosocially, the modest effect can still have a significant impact at a societal level,” he says.

What other, specific benefits might kindness have? The researchers found that people who were kind tended to have higher self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy. To a lesser degree, they also experienced less depression and anxiety and improved physical health—with the links to health being strongest in older adults.

Hui doesn't know for sure why acting kind might have these different effects on different groups, but he points to [theories put forth by researcher Elizabeth Midlarsky](#): Being kind may make us feel better about ourselves as a person or about the meaning of our lives, confirm our self-competence, distract us from our own troubles and stressors, give us a warm-glow feeling, or help us be more socially connected with others. All of these could potentially improve our well-being—reducing our stress, improving our mood, or providing community—and they could hold more importance at different stages of life, too. By understanding the connection between kindness and well-being, Hui thinks researchers can design better studies that take into account all of the relevant factors, and innovators could create more effective kindness practices. In the future, he hopes there will be kindness apps or online programs that could reach more people, generating a larger impact around the world.

In the meantime, Hui says, the biggest take-home from his research is something he heard the Dalai Lama say long ago: “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_kindness_fits_into_a_happy_life