

Spiritual Wellness: Going Out of Your Way to be Kind

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The best-selling book, *Random Acts of Kindness*, helped to start a movement that has spread around the world. The book, and the many books on kindness that followed, helped to highlight the transformative power that each of us has to change the world with kindness, one person at a time. To honor the principles of kindness, November 15 is designated as World Kindness Day.

Being kind is as easy as complimenting someone on a job well done, making a donation to a food drive or giving a call to someone you care about just to see how they are doing. People who perform acts of kindness generally agree that doing a kind deed for someone else makes them "feel good." But apart from sheer niceness, why should people be encouraged to commit Acts of Kindness? Are there any other concrete benefits that would motivate more people to become kinder? The answer is an overwhelming "yes!" A number of studies show that Acts of Kindness result in significant health benefits for those who perform them.

One of the most compelling studies on kindness was documented in *The Healing Power of Doing Good*. Written by Allan Luks, it explores the spiritual health benefits of helping others. Luks studied over 3000 volunteers asking them how they felt when they did a kind act. He found a clear cause-and-effect relationship between helping and good health. In a nutshell, Luks' concluded, "Helping others contributes to the maintenance of good health. It can diminish the effect of stress while promoting physical, psychological and spiritual health."

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In his book, Luks documents how helping others contributes to the maintenance of good health. Some of the specific benefits include:

- Stress-related health problems improve after performing kind acts.
- Helping others supplies social contact and decreases feelings of isolation.
- Helping can enhance our feelings of joyfulness, emotional resilience and vitality.
- An increased sense of self-worth, greater happiness, and optimism, as well as a decrease in feelings of helplessness and depression, is achieved.
- The sense of well-being returns even days after when the helping act is remembered.



The volunteers in Luks' study testified to feeling a rush of euphoria, followed by a longer period of calm, after performing a kind act. This feeling, which Luks calls "helper's high," involves physical sensations that strongly indicate a sharp reduction in stress and the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. This initial rush is then followed by a longer-lasting period of improved emotional and spiritual well-being. So, for better health, commit a random act of kindness today. If you go out of your way to be kind to someone, you just might feel better yourself!