



The Art of Kindness

Kindness is more than behavior. The art of kindness means harboring a spirit of helpfulness, as well as being generous and considerate, and doing so without expecting anything in return. Kindness is a quality of being. The act of giving kindness often is simple, free, positive and healthy. <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/the-art-of-kindness>

Good for the body

Kindness has been shown to increase self-esteem, empathy and compassion, and improve mood. It can decrease blood pressure and cortisol, a stress hormone, which directly impacts stress levels. People who give of themselves in a balanced way also tend to be healthier and live longer. Kindness can increase your sense of connectivity with others, which can directly impact loneliness, improve low mood and enhance relationships in general. It also can be contagious. Looking for ways to show kindness can give you a focus activity, especially if you tend to be anxious or stressed in some social situations.

Good for the mind

Physiologically, kindness can positively change your brain. Being kind boosts serotonin and dopamine, which are neurotransmitters in the brain that give you feelings of satisfaction and well-being, and cause the pleasure/reward centers in your brain to light up. Endorphins, which are your body's natural pain killer, also can be released. Discover ways you can create happiness.

Be kind to yourself

It is not just how you treat other people — it is how you extend those same behaviors and intentions to yourself as well. I believe you can be kinder in your own self-talk and practice gratitude. People are good at verbally beating themselves up, and rarely does that work as a pep talk. Rather, negativity often causes you to unravel and may even create a vicious cycle of regularly getting down on yourself. You wouldn't talk to your neighbor the way you sometimes talk to yourself. This is what I call the "good neighbor policy," which can be helpful. If you would not say it to your good neighbor, do not say it about yourself.

Take action

Simply asking "How am I going to practice kindness today?" can be helpful. For a homework assignment, I have invited some clients to pay attention and periodically document during the day their evidence of kindness to others and especially to themselves. This positive focus is like planting positive seeds in your mind garden. Where focus goes, energy flows.

I recently was talking about kindness to a young client who asked if I wanted them to get on the ark. I asked what that meant. The client said, "Acts of random kindness." That was a great response from a young person. How about you? Are you willing to get on the ark?

Consider joining Mayo Clinic Health System's Kickstart Kindness program to start your kindness journey. The program offers many ideas of how to extend kindness.



<https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/kindness>

Finally, I'd like to leave you with this quote:
"Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." —Dalai Lama

Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits

Why volunteer?

With busy lives, it can be hard to find time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering can be enormous. Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for you, the volunteer. The right match can help you to find friends, connect with the community, learn new skills, and even advance your career.

Giving to others can also help protect your mental and physical health. It can reduce stress, combat depression, keep you mentally stimulated, and provide a sense of purpose. While it's true that the more you volunteer, the more benefits you'll experience, volunteering doesn't have to involve a long-term commitment or take a huge amount of time out of your busy day. Giving in even simple ways can help those in need and improve your health and happiness.

Benefits of volunteering, 4 ways to feel healthier and happier.

Benefit 1: Volunteering connects you to others

One of the more well-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place.

Make new friends and contacts.

One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, especially if you are new to an area. It strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighborhood resources, and fun and fulfilling activities.

Increase your social and relationship skills.

While some people are naturally outgoing, others are shy and have a hard time meeting new people. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice and develop your social skills, since you are meeting regularly with a group of people with common interests. Once you have momentum, it's easier to branch out and make more friends and contacts.

Volunteering as a family.

Children watch everything you do. By giving back to the community, you'll show them firsthand how volunteering makes a difference and how good it feels to help other people and animals and enact change. It's also a valuable way for you to get to know organizations in the community and find resources and activities for your children and family.

Benefit 2: Volunteering is good for your mind and body

Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health.

Volunteering helps counteract the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety.

The social contact aspect of helping and working with others can have a profound effect on your overall psychological well-being. Nothing relieves stress better than a meaningful connection to another person. Working with pets and other animals has also been shown to improve mood and reduce stress and anxiety.

Volunteering combats depression.

Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against depression.

Volunteering makes you happy.

By measuring hormones and brain activity, researchers have discovered that being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure. Human beings are hard-wired to give to others. The more we give, the happier we feel.

Volunteering increases self-confidence.

You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity. And the better you feel about yourself, the more likely you are to have a positive view of your life and future goals.

Volunteering provides a sense of purpose.

Older adults, especially those who have retired or lost a spouse, can find new meaning and direction in their lives by helping others. Whatever your age or life situation, volunteering can help take your mind off your own worries, keep you mentally stimulated, and add more zest to your life.

Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy.

Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not. Older volunteers tend to walk more, find it easier to cope with everyday tasks, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills. Volunteering can also lessen symptoms of chronic pain and reduce the risk of heart disease.

I have limited mobility—can I still volunteer?

People with disabilities or chronic health conditions can still benefit greatly from volunteering. In fact, research has shown that adults with disabilities or health conditions ranging from hearing and vision loss to heart disease, diabetes or digestive disorders all show improvement after volunteering.

Whether due to a disability, a lack of transportation, or time constraints, many people choose to volunteer their time via phone or computer. In today's digital age, many organizations need help with writing, graphic design, email, and other web-based tasks. Some organizations may require you to attend an initial training session or periodical meetings while others can be conducted completely remotely. In any volunteer situation, make sure that you are getting enough social contact, and that the organization is available to support you should you have questions.

Benefit 3: Volunteering can advance your career

If you're considering a new career, volunteering can help you get experience in your area of interest and meet people in the field. Even if you're not planning on changing careers, volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice important skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organization. You might feel more comfortable stretching your wings at work once you've honed these skills in a volunteer position first.

Teaching you valuable job skills.

Just because volunteer work is unpaid does not mean the skills you learn are basic. Many volunteering opportunities provide extensive training. For example, you could become an experienced crisis counselor while volunteering for a women's shelter or a knowledgeable art historian while donating your time as a museum docent.

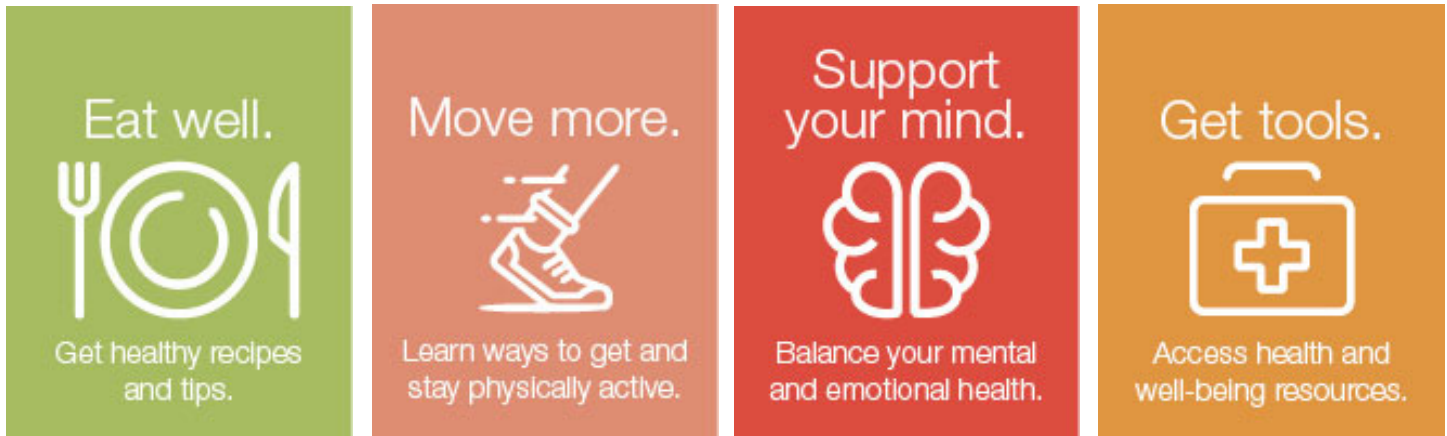
Volunteering can also help you build upon skills you already have and use them to benefit the greater community. For instance, if you hold a successful sales position, you can raise awareness for your favorite cause as a volunteer advocate, while further developing and improving your public speaking, communication, and marketing skills.

Gaining career experience.

Volunteering offers you the chance to try out a new career without making a long-term commitment. It is also a great way to gain experience in a new field. In some fields, you can volunteer directly at an organization that does the kind of work you're interested in. For example, if you're interested in nursing, you could volunteer at a hospital or a nursing home.

Your volunteer work might also expose you to professional organizations or internships that could benefit your career.

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When it comes to volunteering, passion and positivity are the only requirements.

While learning new skills can be beneficial to many, it's not a requirement for a fulfilling volunteer experience. Bear in mind that the most valuable assets you can bring to any volunteer effort are compassion, an open mind, a willingness to pitch in wherever needed, and a positive attitude.

Benefit 4: Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life

Volunteering is a fun and easy way to explore your interests and passions. Doing volunteer work you find meaningful and interesting can be a relaxing, energizing escape from your day-to-day routine of work, school, or family commitments. Volunteering also provides you with renewed creativity, motivation, and vision that can carry over into your personal and professional life.

Many people volunteer in order to make time for hobbies outside of work as well. For instance, if you have a desk job and long to spend time outdoors, you might consider volunteering to help plant a community garden, walk dogs for an animal shelter, or help out at a children's camp.

Eat This, Help That

Need an easy way to remember which foods benefit what? These eats resemble the body parts they take care of.



FOOD:
WALNUTS
Helps: Brain

These wrinkly nuts are a strong source of cognitively protective compounds such as alpha-linolenic acid (an omega 3 fatty acid) and polyphenols, both of which reduce inflammation to support brain function.



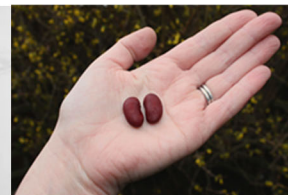
FOOD:
CARROTS
Helps: Eyes

Carrots contain beta-carotene, which your body converts to vitamin A. Research indicates that vitamin A can help reduce the risk of macular degeneration, as well as help prevent dryness and enhance night vision.



FOOD:
RED WINE
Helps: Blood

Red vino contains an antioxidant called resveratrol, which may help lower blood pressure (drink it in moderation, of course).



FOOD:
KIDNEY BEANS
Helps: Kidneys

If your kidneys are healthy, kidney beans can help keep them that way. Their soluble fiber promotes stable blood sugar and helps lower "bad" LDL cholesterol. But people with kidney disease should limit their intake, as the potassium and phosphorus can tax weak kidneys.



FOOD:
TOMATOES
Helps: Heart

The antioxidant lycopene has shown the potential to benefit heart health by improving cholesterol levels and reducing stroke risk. Cook tomatoes in extra virgin olive oil to increase lycopene absorption.