

# Random Acts of Kindness



## Why Compassion?

Humans are tribal beings, we're motivated by a desire to help, in fact there's good evidence that it's part of our deep evolutionary purpose and vital to the survival of our species<sup>1</sup>.

As you start to take your own life in order, getting engaged, going out of your way to help the physical, intellectual, spiritual, or emotional needs of another is a natural next step.

*A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "universe," a part limited in time and space.*

*He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.*

*This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.*

*Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by **widening our circle of compassion** to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.*

*Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.*

*~ Albert Einstein ~*

Here are some of the reasons to practice compassion, it makes us: feel good, activating pleasure circuits and leading to lasting increases in self-reported happiness, reduces the risk of heart disease, our minds wander less, more optimistic and supportive, better friends with greater satisfaction and growth, more positive, less vulnerable to stress and harm to the immune system.

*"People who practice compassion produce 100% more DHEA, which is a hormone that counteracts the ageing process, and 23% less cortisol – the "stress hormone"<sup>2</sup>.*

The good news is that 'yes' you can practice compassion and get better at it. And here's a biggy - When we think [we're capable of making a difference](#), we're less likely to curb our compassion. So keep building that capability and we'll be able to practice our compassion even more.

*"Compassion is not the same as [empathy](#) or [altruism](#), though the concepts are related. While empathy refers more generally to our ability to take the perspective of and feel the emotions of another person, compassion is when those feelings and thoughts include the desire to help. Altruism, in turn, is the kind, selfless behavior often prompted by feelings of compassion, though one can feel compassion without acting on it, and altruism isn't always motivated by compassion."<sup>3</sup>*

Compassion has a particular connection to emotion and action.

*"While cynics may dismiss compassion as touchy-feely or irrational, scientists have started to map the biological basis of compassion, [suggesting its deep evolutionary purpose](#). This research has shown that when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down, we secrete the "bonding hormone" oxytocin, and regions of the brain linked to [empathy](#), [caregiving](#), and [feelings of pleasure](#) light up, which often results in our wanting to approach and care for other people."<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> From [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the\\_compassionate\\_species](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_compassionate_species) [Accessed 14 May 2015]

<sup>2</sup> From <http://www.seedsofcompassion.org/why> [Accessed 25 May 2015]

<sup>3</sup> From [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the\\_compassionate\\_species](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_compassionate_species) [Accessed 14 May 2015]

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Connecting with others is one of the quickest and surest routes to happiness. Now that you've learnt a little more about yourself, it's time to turn the focus outward to connect this new you to others through compassion. Start with a random act of kindness.

### Here's what to do:

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's more effective if you perform a variety of acts.

The acts don't 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, donating blood, 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.

Now the challenge is to do this once a week for six weeks—are you up for it?

This exercise is from the [Greater Good in Action](#) website – Science based practices for a meaningful life.



*"To take care of yourself,  
take care of others"  
~ Rick Hanson ~*

