

Loving-kindness meditation will make you happier: Study

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Researchers from HSE University compared the effect of two meditation practices—loving-kindness meditation (LKM) and compassion meditation (CM). Loving-kindness meditation turned out to

be more effective when it comes to increasing happiness, but, in contrast with previous studies, compassion meditation also did not result in a growth of negative emotions. The paper was published in *Mindfulness* journal.

Meditation has long become a routine for many people, particularly in the US and Western Europe. It is used to restore energy, decrease stress, and find inspiration. Different types of meditation have different effects. Researchers are increasingly interested in these hardly measurable but nevertheless important differences in the impact that [meditation practices](#) have on people's emotional state.

In Buddhism, there is a group of practices called the 'four immeasurable meditations.' It includes loving-kindness meditation, compassion meditation, appreciative joy meditation, and equanimity meditation. While they differ from each other and can be used separately, they are all aimed at forming positive messages to others and oneself.

Judging by their names, loving-kindness meditation and [compassion meditation](#) may seem similar, but they also have rooted theoretical differences. While LKM is about the meditator's motivation to see others be happy, CM aims to alleviate the feeling of suffering.

The researchers sought to answer the question as to whether the outcomes of the two practices differ and what emotions they cause. They recommended that volunteers practice one of the meditations: the first group practiced LKM, and the second practiced CM. Each of the participants received a 15-min audio with the meditation practice instructions. The third, control, group, solved a crossword puzzle. Before and after the experiment, the participants completed a questionnaire, where they evaluated the emotions they were experiencing. A total of 201 American students participated in the experiment; none of them had practiced meditation before.

The study showed that the participants who practiced one of the meditations noticed a significant increase in happiness, as well as love and care for other people. LKM was more effective in increasing positive emotions and happiness.

"The higher effectiveness of loving-kindness meditation may be a sign that this type of meditation is more suitable to newcomers—those who have never tried meditation before," said Ulyana Sirotina, one of the paper's authors. "Compassion meditation is traditionally practiced after one has already mastered LKM."

The researchers had assumed that CM would increase negative emotions, since the meditator is focused on suffering, but this did not happen. This [conclusion](#) contradicts an earlier study, where those practicing compassion experienced more sadness than before meditation. The researchers believe that the difference in the results may be due to differences in procedures: the instructions in the two experiments were different. While participants focused on compassion toward friends and strangers in the earlier study, this time they were also prompted to show self-compassion, which helped them deal with sadness. Self-[compassion](#) is likely a key factor responsible for positive emotions during CM, an assumption that could be evaluated in future studies.

These conclusions gave the researchers a deeper understanding of how strongly various meditation instructions may impact their emotional state. Since meditation is increasingly used by [medical professionals](#) and psychologists in [clinical practice](#), such studies serve to enrich knowledge on the use of specific [meditation](#) approaches.

More information: Ulyana Sirotina et al, Loving-Kindness Meditation and Compassion Meditation: Do They Affect Emotions in a Different Way?, *Mindfulness* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s12671-020-01465-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01465-9)

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