

TIME. HEALTH

The Reason You Make Unhealthy Choices.- [Mandy Oaklander](#)

1. Self love isn't just for hippies and millennials. If you're trying to stick to a diet or scrape together the motivation to get to the gym, it might be for you, too.
2. So finds a new [meta-analysis](#) published in the journal *Health Psychology*. Self-compassion—accepting yourself without judgment when times get tough—is linked to better health behaviors.
3. People often think that they are motivated by self-criticism, but a [burgeoning area of research](#) suggests the opposite. Being kind to yourself, as opposed to tearing yourself down, leads to fewer bad feelings and, in turn, healthier actions. One [study](#) found that when people were assigned to practice self-compassion, they were able to curb their smoking habit faster. The reason self-compassion works, researchers think, might be its ability to improve self-regulation: the follow-through you need to stay loyal to healthy behaviors.
4. This analysis looked at 15 studies of more than 3,000 total people across the age spectrum and discovered a link between self-compassion and four key health-promoting behaviors: eating better, exercising more, getting more restful sleep, and stressing less. People who were more self-compassionate practiced these health habits more often.
5. “So much research right now is suggesting that not engaging in these behaviors can be the precursor to a variety of different life-threatening and chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, you name it,” says study author Fuschia Sirois, professor of psychology at Bishop's University in Quebec. Developing self-compassion is a way to commit to the behaviors you already know you should do, she says.
6. In addition to just being nice to yourself, self-compassion requires you to embrace that you're part of the human race that shares common miseries, and mindfully recognize negative feelings without getting enmeshed in them. If that sounds impossible, Sirois assures us it's not.
7. “One of the reasons we were quite excited by the findings is that self-compassion is a quality that can be cultivated,” says Sirois. Writing a letter to yourself—as if you were your own friend—and opening it up in times of stress or failure is one way to start, she suggests. Kristin Neff, a pioneer in this field of research, offers guided self-compassion meditations and exercises on her [site](#).
8. Find out where you currently fall on the scientific scale for self-love [here](#).