Mental Fitness via Love and Kindness
By Shannon Moseley, M.S.

Recent research has shown that helping others has multiple benefits for your own mental health. This means that one of the best ways to manage stress and improve your overall wellbeing is to make a point of being available to serve others. This doesn’t necessarily require a time commitment. It can be as simple as giving up your seat for a person in need, asking someone who is alone to dine with you, or paying for a stranger’s drink.

Having an altruistic nature and making the point of being a RAKtivist (Random Acts of Kindness activist) is good for others, but is especially beneficial for YOU. How can this be that Random Acts of Kindness can make a person healthier and happier? The following is a list posted by The Mental Health Foundation of Great Britain with some of the key benefits of RAK:

1. **Promotes positive physiological changes in the brain associated with happiness.**
   Giving to others releases endorphins which then activate parts of our brain that are associated with trust, pleasure and social connection. Being altruistic and spending money on others leads to greater levels of happiness compared to when you spend money on yourself. This happiness then increases the chance that you will be altruistic in the future, ultimately creating a positive feedback loop of generosity and happiness.

2. **Helps to keep things in perspective**
   Helping others in need, especially those who are less fortunate than yourself, can provide a sense of perspective and can make you realize how lucky you are, enabling you to stop focusing on what you feel may be missing in your life - this helps you achieve a more positive outlook on the things that may be causing you stress.

3. **Reduces stress and improves your health**
   Evidence suggests that altruism can boost your health. Emotions which are related to altruism such as compassion may help stabilize the immune system against immunosuppressing effects of stress. Altruistic acts may also decrease pain by stimulating the brain to release endorphins, which are powerful natural painkillers.
4. Helps reduce negative feelings
People who are altruistic have better life adjustment overall and tend to see life as more meaningful. Altruism is associated with better marital relationships, a decreased sense of hopelessness, less depression, increased physical health, and enhanced self-esteem.

5. It can help you live longer
Giving may increase how long you live. Studies on older people show that those who give support to others live longer than those who don’t.

The Counseling Center will be celebrating RAK 8-10 FEB, 10AM-2PM, in the Sam Rayburn Student Center’s Atrium. Please stop by for inspiration and celebration of the altruistic human spirit! Additionally, don’t forget that you can spread RAK via social media. Be sure to keep us in the loop on Twitter at: @TAMUC_CounCtr. You are also encouraged to stop by on 10 FEB, at the same place and time, to reflect on specific relationships with our 5th Annual “Relationship Roadmap”.