



The Honest Truth about Honesty & Health

Growing up, you likely heard the phrase, “Honesty is the best policy”. Being honest is an important value in both personal and professional settings, allowing for people to authentically connect with one another and set clear expectations and boundaries. However, there may be instances where withholding the truth may feel more beneficial than being honest. Research indicates that while speaking the truth does have health benefits, there is nuance to speaking frankly.

According to empirical research from [The University of Rochester and Michigan State University](#), there are many health benefits to being honest. In one recent study that focused on older adults, the researchers noted that “those who were higher in honesty displayed health benefits” including a reduced risk of depression, reduced risk of lung cancer, and less difficulty with mobility and using day to day tools.

The researchers also noted the many mental and interpersonal benefits of honesty as well. In an additional study, those who told the truth had improved mental health, such as “stronger intrinsic aspirations—including self-acceptance, affiliation, and communal feelings.” These participants also maintained stronger friendships and interpersonal relationships, and they also found more meaning in life.

In her own study, Anita E. Kelly reported similar findings. In her article in [Psychology Today](#), Kelly discusses working with 72 volunteers in an experiment where everyone in the experimental group had to speak honestly for 5 weeks, while everyone in the control group could conduct

themselves as normal. By the end of the study, Kelly and her research partner noted that the experimental group were experiencing less health complaints than those in the control group. Some of the reported findings included fewer reports of nausea and fewer reports of headaches.

And while there are many mental and physical benefits to honesty, research at The University of Rochester and Michigan State University also indicated some health concerns that could occur when being honest, such as feeling stressed when you have to speak the truth. There can also be social strains if telling the truth would hurt someone's feelings and create feelings of hostility. However, the research also indicates that while honesty may not create more instances of pleasure for an individual, those who told the truth reported having a better self-concept, and therefore more easily find meaning in life. Though honest conversations may create stressors, they also indicate that those who are honest have a better perspective on life, which could help navigate situations more clearly and peacefully.

There are both benefits and costs to being honest, but the research overwhelmingly supports that honesty is the best policy when it comes to health benefits, both mentally and physically.