

Benefits of Giving

Kaylin Kwan, Macy 4-H Club, County Youth Healthy Living Chair

With Christmas coming around the corner, some of us may be hesitant on how much to spend, or to even spend at all, on gifts for family and friends this holiday. However, even the smallest thing can go a long way. We all know the saying, "It's better to give than to receive", and this is actually backed up with studies, proving that giving can boost physical and mental health.

During gift-giving behaviors, humans release "feel good" chemicals like serotonin (a mood mediator), dopamine (helps one feel good), and oxytocin (a compassion and bonding chemical) in our brains. Researchers discovered that when individuals give to charity, the mesolimbic pathway in their brain is stimulated. This pathway leads to the reward center of the brain and releases endorphins, creating a feeling known as the "helper's high".

Generosity can truly lead to healing, as it boosts longevity and improve our immune system. People who give and receive participate in supportive interaction, whether through gift giving or social support, have lower blood pressure and recover from coronary-related events better than those who don't. Individuals who help in their community and have organizational involvement tend to have greater self-esteem, which decreases likeliness of depression and lowers stress and anxiety levels.

The true reason why giving is so great is because gratitude grows from service, the positive feeling is mutual, and you can be paying it forward. When people give gifts or help out in community service, a bond between all those participating grows. Seeing someone benefit and feel joy because of your actions brings a sense of appreciation and gratefulness into your life. Whenever one performs a good deed for someone, it often as a ripple effect that can trigger similar small acts of kindness in others.