

The Healing Power of Doing Good: The Health and Spiritual Benefits of Helping Others

by Allan Luks

Allan Luks, former executive director of the Institute for the Advancement of Health and executive director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of New York City, has studied kindness and the clear cause-and-effect relationship between helping and good health.

Some of the most significant findings of his research include the following:

1. Helping others contributes to the maintenance of good health and can diminish the effect of minor and serious psychological and physical diseases and disorders.
2. The rush of euphoria often referred to as a “helper’s high” after performing a kind act involves physical sensations and the release of the body’s natural painkillers, the endorphins. The initial rush is followed by a longer period of calm and improved emotional well-being.
3. The health benefits and sense of well-being return for hours or even days whenever the helping act is remembered.
4. Stress related health problems improve after performing kind acts. Helping others:
 - Reverses feelings of depression.
 - Supplies social contact.
 - Reduces feelings of hostility and isolation that can cause stress, overeating, ulcers, etc.
 - Decreases the constriction in the lungs that leads to asthma attacks.
5. Helping can enhance feelings of joyfulness, emotional resilience, and vigor, and can reduce the unhealthy sense of isolation.
6. The awareness and intensity of physical pain can decrease.
7. Attitudes such as chronic hostility that negatively arouse and damage the body are reduced.
8. A sense of self-worth, greater happiness, and optimism is increased, and feelings of helplessness and depression decrease.
9. When we establish an “affiliative connection” with someone (a relationship of friendship, love, or some sort of positive bonding), we feel emotions that can strengthen the immune system.
10. Caring for strangers leads to immense immune and healing benefits.
11. Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or faith group attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree, or more than doubling your income.