

TIP OF THE MONTH

ENRICH YOUR WELL-BEING THROUGH ALTRUISM

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Did you know that socially connected individuals live longer and fight disease better? Strong social relationships predict health more than many biological and economic factors, and they can buffer against anxiety and depression. Altruistic behaviors can even relieve physical pain. Cultivating altruism and helping others are potent ways to boost our own health and well-being.

But the benefits we gain from helping others are not limited to reduced disease and improved physical health. Altruism is a potent contributor to life satisfaction, happiness, and a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life. According to a Gallup World Poll of more than 1 million people in 150 countries, generosity (as measured by charitable donations) is one of the strongest predictors of life satisfaction.

Volunteering is a great way to expand your social network and build new friendships. Research

shows that both consistency and diversity of volunteering are significantly related to improved health and well-being—even more so if you volunteer in a group.

In a survey of 4,500 adults who volunteered 100 hours/year or more, respondents claimed the effects volunteering had on them personally:



Felt happier



Felt their lives were enriched

Volunteering leads to two types of well-being: hedonic well-being (feeling good) and eudaimonic well-being (feeling good about oneself). For the latter, it's believed that the mechanism is “mattering,” or the perception that we are a significant part of the world around us.

Why does helping others help our own well-being? As social animals, preserving connection is written into our DNA. When we feel socially disconnected or isolated, our bodies interpret this as a survival threat – which can activate the same alarm system that responds to other critical survival threats, such as a hungry tiger! Prolonged disconnection can result in dire consequences for our physical and mental health. Conversely, when we feel cared for, valued, and connected, reward-related brain systems are activated – leading to reciprocal caregiving and a health-promoting upward spiral of connection and social well-being.

“Altruism is a benevolent state of mind. To be altruistic is to be concerned about the fate of all those around us and to wish them well. This should be done together with the determination to act for their benefit. Valuing others is the main state of mind that leads to altruism.”

Matthieu Ricard

How to Help Make Altruism/Kindness a Part of Your Overall Well-being Plan

With all of the positive impacts of volunteering and giving to others, it makes good sense to make altruism/kindness a part of your overall well-being plan. One way to do this is to cultivate an altruistic mindset. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Practice being compassionate to yourself as well as to others.
- Recognize when we feel pain

and suffering that we feel alone, but in reality, pain and suffering is something that connects us all.

- Talk to yourself like you would a good friend (vs. a harsh critic).
- Look at how you can help friends, family members, co-workers, and community members.
- Do [simple acts of kindness](#) in order to brighten the day of someone else.
- Get involved in an organization within the community or a cause for which you have a desire to make an impact.
- Think about skills you could share with the organization.
- If you do not have time to give, consider giving financially.

How You Can Get Involved Locally:

- Subscribe to a non-profit newsletter
- Attend events and get to know the organization
- Visit www.reimaginecva.org to see what opportunities exist
- Participate in UVA’s Day of Caring (September 22, 2021)
- Participate in the [CVC campaign](#)
- Look into the [UVA Employee Volunteer Center](#)
- Find other opportunities at the [United Way of Greater Charlottesville](#)

We encourage you to take some time to think about how you can integrate more altruism and kindness in your life.

FEAP is here to support you with the challenges you may be having in your life. Please reach out to FEAP for free, confidential assistance at 434.243.2643 or on our [website](#).

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