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Volunteer Your Way to Better Mental Health

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*“When the happiness, security and well-being of others become real to us, we come into our own... Creativity, meaning, resilience, health and even longevity can be enhanced as a surprising byproduct of contributing to the lives of others. This is perennial wisdom, and science now says it is so.” — Dr. Stephen Post, Professor of preventive medicine and bioethics at Stony Brook University School of Medicine and author of *The Hidden Gifts of Helping**

As we approach Thanksgiving and other holidays, our thoughts typically turn to helping others. Interestingly, our altruism can serve another function - it can make us feel good by providing a [“helper’s high”](#) and [“giver’s glow”](#). Scientists have found that people feel happier and healthier after they have been philanthropic. Even the thought of making a donation has been shown to affect brain scans by activating the mesolimbic pathways linked with dopamine production and happiness.

[According to The Denver Post](#), millions of adult volunteers in America report that their altruism has lowered their stress levels as well as improved their physical and mental health. They feel a greater sense of purpose and happiness.

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Volunteering benefits society in so many ways, individually and collectively. [The Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley](#) cites Sonia Lyubomirsky, author of *The How of Happiness*, "Being kind and generous leads you to perceive others more positively and more charitably... [and in doing so] fosters a heightened sense of interdependence and cooperation in your social community."

Look for ways to help others, whether in large or small acts. You can help an elderly neighbor pick up their weekly groceries, assist at a food bank or find an organization that needs volunteers. Websites like [Do Something](#) will let you choose a cause, duration and type of opportunity.

Thank you for your good work in advance, and have a happy Thanksgiving.

Co-authored with Shane Power, President of Watertree Health, where Lisa works in communication and business development.