



## *Want to Improve Your Health in 2020? Give More.*

As the new decade begins, we have some good news for you. To achieve one of the most popular new year's goals—improving your health—you may not have to stock your fridge with kale or dust off the treadmill in your basement. Multiple scientific studies over the past two decades show that the simple act of giving, whether time or money, boosts both your physical and mental well-being.

On the most basic level, giving makes us feel better. Years ago, in a study funded by NIH's National Institute on Aging and the National Science Foundation, researchers looked at the MRIs of subjects who gave to charity. They found that giving activates pleasure centers in the brain, releasing endorphins and creating a “helper's high.” On top of that, there's some evidence that giving creates a lasting positive effect, according to a more recent [study](#). With other enjoyable things—eating the same dessert, say, or receiving the same income—happiness decreases with repeated exposure.

Good feelings tend to snowball, too. The happier you feel, the better care you may take of yourself—perhaps even stepping on that treadmill after all. Giving evokes a sense of gratitude in the recipient and giver alike, and gratitude is essential to happiness. In a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, researchers found that when college students were asked to focus regularly on things they were grateful for, they exercised more and reported feeling more satisfied with their lives.

Giving may produce more direct health benefits, too. For instance, in a study published in the *Journal of Health Psychology*, participants who donated money had lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol than those who chose to keep more for themselves. High levels of cortisol can take a toll on health, impacting everything from GI function to memory. Michael J. Poulin, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Buffalo, conducted a five-year [study](#) of 846 individuals which found that helping others reduced the risk of early death, most likely by buffering the effects of stress.

Of course, as the calendar indicates the start of a new year, we wouldn't discourage you from resolving to eat healthier or exercise more. Still, it's nice to know that during the past year, your gifts of time and money already may have put you on a path to better health.

From the entire staff of National Philanthropic Trust, we wish you a very happy and healthy New Year!

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