

DOING
GOOD
DOES YOU
GOOD

**A pocket guide
to helping others**



**mental
health
foundation**

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Introduction

It's often said that it's better to give than receive but did you know that this is actually backed up by research?

While many of us feel too stressed and busy to worry about helping others, or say we'll focus on doing good deeds when we have more 'spare time', evidence shows that helping others is actually beneficial for your own mental health and wellbeing. It can help reduce stress, improve your emotional wellbeing and even benefit your physical health.

As part of our work to help the nation lead mentally healthy lives, we have produced this pocket guide to show the positive impact that helping others can have on your own mental health, including some tips and suggestions to help you get started and a diary to keep track of how you're getting on.

So just take a few minutes, have a read and do something nice for a friend or a stranger today.



Dr Andrew McCulloch
Chief Executive,
Mental Health Foundation

What is altruism?

What do we mean by the word altruism? In short, altruism is when we put other people's needs before our own, whether it's offering your seat to a pregnant woman on a bus or making a cup of tea for a work colleague.

And what's more, evidence shows that helping others can have a positive effect on your own mental health and wellbeing. For example, it can reduce stress as well as improve mood, self-esteem and happiness.

There are many different ways that you can help others as part of your everyday life. Carrying out good deeds doesn't need to take a lot of time or even cost money. Small changes can make a big difference.

This booklet gives you some ideas and tips to get you started by looking in more detail at:

- Volunteering
- Mentoring
- Doing something for a good cause
- Random acts of kindness

What are the health benefits?

Mental health and wellbeing benefits

1. Helping others feels good

When you help others, it promotes positive physiological changes in the brain associated with happiness.

These rushes are often followed by longer periods of calm and can eventually lead to better wellbeing.

Helping others improves social support, encourages us to lead a more physically active lifestyle, distracts us from our own problems, allows us to engage in a meaningful activity and improves our self-esteem and competence.

2. It brings a sense of belonging and reduces isolation

Being a part of a social network leads to a feeling of belonging.

Face-to-face activities such as volunteering at a drop-in centre can help reduce loneliness and isolation.

3. It helps to keep things in perspective

Many people don't realise the impact that a different perspective can have on their outlook on life.

Helping others in need, especially those who are less fortunate than yourself, can provide a real sense of perspective and make you realise how lucky you are, enabling you to stop focusing on what you feel you are missing - helping you to achieve a more positive outlook on the things that may be causing you stress.

4. It helps make the world a happier place – it's contagious!

Acts of kindness have the potential to make the world a happier place. An act of kindness can improve confidence, control, happiness and optimism.

It can also encourage others to repeat the good deed that they've experienced themselves – it contributes to a more positive community.

5. The more you do for others, the more you do for yourself

Evidence shows that the benefits of helping others can last long after the act itself by providing a 'kindness bank' of memories that can be drawn upon in the future.

Physical benefits

1. It reduces stress

Doing things for others helps maintain good health.

Positive emotions reduce stress and boost our immune system, and in turn can protect us against disease.

2. It helps get rid of negative feelings

Negative emotions such as anger, aggression or hostility have a negative impact on our mind and body.

Engaging in random acts of kindness can help decrease these feelings and stabilise our overall health.

3. It can help us live longer

Giving and helping others may increase how long we live.

Studies of older people show that those who give support to others live longer than those who don't.

Things to consider before you start

Do something you enjoy

If you love to shop, you could take your elderly neighbour or someone who doesn't get out of the house much with you. If you are a film buff, why not take a friend to the cinema to see a film that you know they would enjoy? And if you enjoy a cuppa, put the kettle on for some friends at the weekend.

Keep others in mind

Although carrying out good deeds for other people can make you feel good, don't forget to keep in mind why you're doing it – to put others' needs before your own. Do something small for someone else just for the sake of it.

Don't overdo it

Make sure you don't overdo it! Giving too much or giving beyond your means is bad for your health and wellbeing. It is important to begin small. Helping others doesn't have to cost you money or take a lot of time - you could start by calling a friend you haven't spoken to in a while, or donating a small amount of money monthly to a charity close to your heart.

Keep a good deeds diary

Make a note every time you do something to help other people and every time other people do something for you. Reflect on how they made you feel and write these feelings down. We've got a handy diary at the end of this booklet to help you keep track.

What you can do

Volunteering

Volunteering is a great way to do something for others and research shows that it benefits people of all ages through increasing feelings of self-esteem, respect, motivation and wellbeing.

Here are some ideas for how you can get involved:

- Become a member of your local neighbourhood watch
- Offer your expertise and support as a mentor or counsellor for those who are in need
- Become involved in a charity that you are passionate about. Using your skills and experiences can help them to achieve their mission
- Involve your friends and neighbours in community projects. You could work together to create a communal garden or you could start-up a book club
- Volunteer your help in a crisis. If your local community has experienced a bad flood or fire, help with the clean-up or even offer your sofa to someone who has been affected
- Volunteer to help people in need in developing countries. You could teach children in schools or help to build houses and hospitals

To find out more on volunteering opportunities, check out our suggested organisations at the end of the booklet.

Mentoring

Mentoring, listening and counselling are all forms of peer support, as are initiatives where colleagues, members of self-help groups and others meet as equals to give each other support.

Supporting your peers by sharing knowledge, experience and emotional help is incredibly valuable. Peers can offer advice, coping strategies and empathy that professionals may not be able to.

Here are some ideas to get you started with mentoring:

- Mentor younger pupils to help them adjust to a new school or college
- Help someone who has a mental health issue, such as depression or anxiety; it can improve confidence, self-awareness and symptoms
- Offer advice to help people with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes
- Older people can help isolated peers reconnect with communities and social networks

We've listed a number of organisations at the end of this booklet that you can get in touch with to find out more.

Doing something for a good cause
Getting involved with a cause that is close to your heart can be hugely beneficial for both the cause you are supporting and your own sense of wellbeing and achievement.

There are tonnes of other ways you can get involved. Have you thought of these?

- Follow your chosen charity on Facebook and/or Twitter and join in with the conversation
- Sign-up to receive your charity's newsletter and keep up-to-date with the work they're doing
- Hold a fundraising event in your local community or at work – there's nothing wrong with a good old bake sale or you could even organise a quiz night at your local pub
- Raise money by taking part in a fun sporting event, such as a 5k run or walk in fancy dress or maybe a themed sports day
- If you fancy a big challenge, you could run a marathon or even take part in a sponsored sky dive
- Display awareness raising posters in your workplace, school, local library or GP surgery

Whatever you decide to do, make sure you have fun with it!

We have lots of ways to get involved with the Mental Health Foundation. You can find out more on our website www.mentalhealth.org.uk or you can contact our fundraising team on supporter@mhf.org.uk or 020 7803 1121.

Random acts of kindness

Not sure where to start? We've put together some suggestions to help you out:

At home and in your community

- Call a friend that you haven't spoken to for a while
- Send a letter to your nan and grandad
- Send flowers to a friend out of the blue
- Offer to pick up some groceries for your elderly neighbour
- Help a friend pack for a move
- Send someone a handwritten thank you note
- Offer to babysit for a friend
- Walk your friend's dog
- Tell your family members how much you love and appreciate them
- Help your mum with household chores
- Shovel snow for an elderly neighbour
- Check on someone you know who is going through a tough time
- Help a friend get active

At work

- Make a cup of tea for your colleagues
- Get to know the new staff member
- Lend your ear - listen to your colleague who is having a bad day
- Say good morning
- Bake a cake for your colleagues
- Give praise to your colleague for something they've done well

In public places

- Give up your seat to an elderly, disabled or pregnant person
- Let someone jump the queue at the supermarket
- Take a minute to help a tourist who is lost even though you are in a rush
- Have a conversation with a homeless person
- Help a mother carrying her push chair down the stairs or hold the door for her
- Let a fellow driver merge into your lane
- Pick up some rubbish lying around in the street
- Smile and say hello to people you may pass every day, but have never spoken to before

Useful organisations and information

Direct Gov

For general guidance about how to get involved in your community.
www.tinyurl.com/cannnhq

Do-it

Volunteering made easy. Quickly find ways to help in your community by searching their online database of volunteering opportunities in your area.
www.do-it.org.uk

We are what we do

A non-profit company creating ways for millions of people to do more small things to make a big difference.
wearewhatwedo.org

IVO

IVO is a website linking volunteers with charities and other organisations that could benefit from their time, skills and experience.
www.ivo.org

Kindness UK

Promoting, sharing and uniting kindness. Take part in the first ever nationwide kindness survey.
www.kindnessuk.com

Action for Happiness

Action for Happiness is a movement of people committed to building a happier society.
www.actionforhappiness.org

Samaritans

Volunteers are at the heart of Samaritans' 201 branches across the UK by delivering core services, running branches, fundraising and raising awareness of what they do.
www.samaritans.org/volunteer

Mental Health Foundation

The UK's leading mental health research, policy and service improvement charity. Visit their website for more tips on ways to be kind to others and how to look after your mental health.
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

VSO

Put your skills, energy and personal qualities to work helping people break out of poverty.
www.vso.org.uk/volunteer

Volunteering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Volunteering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity. Their work links policy, research, innovation, good practice and programme management in the involvement of volunteers.

England www.volunteering.org.uk

Scotland www.volunteerscotland.org.uk

Wales www.volunteering-wales.net

Northern Ireland www.volunteernow.co.uk

Volunteer Development Scotland

Scotland's centre for Excellence in volunteering, VDS leads the way in informing and modernising approaches to improve the quality of the volunteering experience for the people of Scotland.

www.vds.org.uk

To find out more about how giving to others can help your mental wellbeing, or to download a copy of our full report, visit www.mentalhealth.org.uk/doinggood.

As a charity we are only able to raise awareness of public mental health issues due to the kind generosity of our donors.

If you would like to help us to continue our work you can donate by post, online at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/donate, by telephone on 020 7803 1121 or text MHAW12 with the amount you'd like to donate (between £1 and £10) to 70070.

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