

DOING GOOD DOES YOU GOOD



Mental Health
Foundation

Contents

Introduction	3
What do we mean by doing good or altruism?	4
What are the health benefits?	6
Things to consider before you start	9
What you can do	10
Peer support	11
Doing something for a good cause	12
Random acts of kindness	14
Useful organisations and information	19
References	24
The Mental Health Foundation	27



Introduction

You may recognise the expression that it is better to give than receive but did you know that this is backed up by research?

There is a strong relationship between the well-being, happiness and longevity of those of us who are compassionate. Doing good can help reduce stress and improve your emotional wellbeing.^{1,2} This is true across our lives.¹

We all have so much going on in our lives, lots of strains and stresses, and we are currently living in a combative political atmosphere. Being kind can get pushed to one side, in favour of what is urgent or what is trending now. But taking time to be kind to other people can make you feel good, help reduce stress and be beneficial for your own emotional wellbeing.¹⁻³

As part of the Mental Health Foundation's work to help people lead mentally healthy lives, we have produced this 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. So, take a few minutes, have a read and think about doing something for a friend or a stranger today.

Mark Rowland

Chief Executive, Mental Health Foundation



What do we mean by doing good or altruism?

Doing good or altruism is when we put other people's needs before our own. This could be by offering your seat on a bus to someone who might need it more than you or making a cup of tea for someone at work.

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.¹⁻³

There are many 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 cost money.

Small changes can make a big difference.

This guide gives you some ideas and ways to start by looking in more detail at:

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



What are the health benefits?

Helping others feels good

There is some evidence to suggest that when you help others, it can promote physiological changes in the brain linked with happiness.²

Helping others can also improve our support networks and encourage us to be more active.⁴ This in turn can improve our self-esteem.⁵

It creates a sense of belonging and reduces isolation

Volunteering and helping others can also help us feel a sense of belonging, make new friends and connect with our community.^{5,6} Face-to-face activities such as volunteering at a food bank can help reduce loneliness and isolation.⁶

It helps keep things in perspective

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

Helping others, especially those who are less fortunate than yourself, can help to put things into perspective and make you feel more positive. There is some evidence that being aware of your own acts of kindness, as well as the things you are grateful for, can increase feelings of happiness, optimism, and satisfaction.^{7,8}

Doing good may help you to have a more positive outlook about your own circumstances.

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 feelings of confidence, being in control, happiness and optimism.⁸

It may also encourage others to repeat the good deed that they've experienced themselves – contributing to a more positive community.⁹

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

The benefits of helping others can last long after the act itself, both for you and them. This in turn can improve our self-esteem.⁵





Things to consider before you start

Do something you enjoy

If you love shopping, you could find out if an elderly neighbour or someone who doesn't get out of the house much would like to come with you.

If you are a cinema fan why not take a friend 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 – for their benefit not yours.

Don't overdo it

It's important to make sure you don't overdo it! If you find that you are giving too much of yourself or have gone beyond your means, why not take a step back. We recommend starting small so that you don't become overwhelmed or give more than you are financially able.

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 and within your budget.¹⁰

What you can do

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, social connection, and wellbeing.⁵

Here are some ideas for how you can get involved:

- Volunteer for a local community organisation.
- Offer your expertise and support as a mentor for those who are struggling.
- Check in with a neighbour who is feeling isolated.
- Get involved in a charity which is important to you.
- 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 community has experienced a bad flood or fire, help with the clean-up.
- Volunteer to help people in need in developing countries, through a well-established organisation. You could teach children in schools or help to build houses and hospitals.

To find out more about volunteering opportunities, check out our suggested organisations at the end of this guide.

Peer support

When you mentor, listen and support people that you share experiences with, this is a form of peer support. Peer support can take place between colleagues or in self-help groups – anywhere where people meet as equals to give each other support.

Supporting your peers by sharing knowledge, experience and emotional help is incredibly valuable. Peers can speak about what worked for them, talk about coping strategies and provide empathy that people who do not have that direct experience may not be able to.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Mentor younger pupils to help them adjust to a new school or college.
- Help people experiencing mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety through a local charity. Doing so can improve your confidence and self-awareness.
- If you're managing a long-term condition such as diabetes, join a support group to help others.
- People in later life can become socially isolated and lonely. Joining or helping someone else join a local organisation can build new friendships.

We've listed a few organisations at the end of this guide 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.^{4,10}

For example, if you want to help the environment, you could get involved in a local tree-planting scheme.

There are lots of other ways you can get involved:

- Follow your chosen charity on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram 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. You can sign up to the Mental Health Foundation's newsletter here: mentalhealth.org.uk/newsletter
- Hold a fundraising event in your local community or at work – why not try a Tea & Talk event?
- 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 challenge you could run a marathon or even take part in a sponsored sky dive.

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 contact our fundraising team on supporter@mentalhealth.org.uk or call 020 7803 1121.

You can also follow us on Facebook and Instagram [@mentalhealthfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthfoundation) and Twitter [@mentalhealth](https://twitter.com/mentalhealth).



Random acts of kindness

Acts of kindness have the potential to make the world a happier place.^{1,7,8}

You might want to do something for someone else or take note if you experience a random act 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
- Post a card or letter to someone you are out of touch with
- Send flowers to a friend out of the blue
- Find out if a neighbour needs any help with shopping
- 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 with household chores
- Shovel snow for an elderly neighbour
- Check on someone you know who is going through a tough time
- Help a friend who wants to get active



At work

- Remember to say hi to colleagues and ask how they are
- Offer to make a drink for your colleagues
- Get to know a new member of staff
- Lend your ear – listen to your colleague who is having a bad day
- Say thank you to a colleague who has helped you
- Praise a colleague for something they have done well



In public places

- Give up your seat to an elderly, disabled or pregnant person
- 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 parent carrying a push chair down some stairs or hold the door for them
- Be a considerate cyclist/driver
- 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



Evidence shows that being kind really does improve your wellbeing.¹ What's more, the more you do for others, the more they are likely to do for you.¹¹ With this in mind, we're asking you to try and help others once a day for a week and see if it makes a difference to how you feel.

Try to keep track of any volunteering that you've done, support you've given to friends and family or any random acts of kindness that you've carried out or that someone has done for you, and make a note of how they made you feel.

It's important to remember yourself too.

Be kind to yourself

- Prioritise some "me" time so you can relax and reflect.
- Treat yourself to something small like buying or planting yourself some flowers
- Do something you enjoy like listening to a favourite song or piece of music
- Spend some time in nature, which is good for your wellbeing



Useful organisations and information

Mental Health Foundation

We are the UK charity for everyone's mental health. Prevention is at the heart of what we do.

Our vision is for a world with good mental health for all. Our mission is to help people to thrive through understanding, protecting and sustaining their mental health.

Visit our website for more tips on ways to be kind to others and how to look after your mental health.
[mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

Action for Happiness

Action for Happiness is a movement of people committed to building a happier society. They also run the International Day of Happiness.

[actionforhappiness.org](https://www.actionforhappiness.org)

Do-it

Volunteering made easy. Quickly find ways to help in your community by searching their online database of volunteering opportunities in your area.

[do-it.org](https://www.do-it.org)

Gov.uk

For general guidance about how to get involved in your community.

[gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

International Voluntary Service

Links volunteers with charities and other organisations that could benefit from their time, skills and experience.

[ivs.gb.org](https://www.ivs.gb.org)

Kindness UK

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

[kindnessuk.com](https://www.kindnessuk.com)

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.

[samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

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.

[vds.org.uk](https://www.vds.org.uk)

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	volunteering.org.uk
Scotland	volunteerscotland.org.uk
Wales	volunteering-wales.net
Northern Ireland	volunteernow.co.uk

VSO

Put your skills, energy and personal qualities to work helping people break out of poverty.

vsointernational.org

The Wildlife and Wetlands Trust

The WWT is an international wildfowl and wetlands conversation charity in the UK.

wwt.org.uk

The World Wide Fund for Nature

The WWF is an international non-governmental organisation founded in 1961, working in the fields of wilderness protection, and the reduction of human impact on the environment.

wwf.org.uk



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We hope you found this booklet informative and useful.

Please consider making a donation to help us continue to provide high-quality, evidence-based information on how to look after your mental health:

mentalhealth.org.uk/donate

or text 'HOW TO' to 70300 to give £3

Mental Health Foundation (registered charity number 801130) will receive 100% of your donation. You may be charged for one text message at your network's standard or charity rate. Always get the bill payer's permission.

We'd like to contact you with news and information about other campaigns, but if you'd rather we did not contact you again then include the words NO INFO at the end of your message e.g. HOW TO NO INFO.

Charity text service provider Vir2 helpline
0330 660 0425.

The Mental Health Foundation

Good mental health for all

Our mission is to help people understand, protect and sustain their mental health.

Prevention is at the heart of what we do, because the best way to deal with a crisis is to prevent it from happening in the first place.

We inform and influence the development of evidence-based mental health policy at national and local government level. In tandem, we help people to access information about the steps they can take to reduce their mental health risks and increase their resilience.

We want to empower people to take action when problems are at an early stage. This work is informed by our long history of working directly with people living with or at risk of developing mental health problems.

The Mental Health Foundation is a UK charity that relies on public donations and grant funding to deliver and campaign for good mental health for all.





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