

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES: GIVING

Continuing the Season of Giving

For a healthy holiday season—and healthier New Year—consider doing just one thing: giving more. Research shows that giving money, time, or talents to benefit others improves the health, happiness, and even prosperity of the giver. In fact, 43 percent of regular donors to charity are more likely to say they are “very happy” than those who do not give. Senior citizens, in particular, enjoy increased wellness (mind and body) through volunteerism. Active charity work also increases the bonds of trust and caring among neighbors—which of course helps everyone.

Some experts believe volunteerism provides physical benefits including relief from insomnia, a stronger immune system, or faster recovery after surgery. In the book “The Healing Power of Doing Good,” author Allan Luks claims that volunteering can produce a “helper’s high” similar to the “high” that comes from intense exercising.

By supporting charitable causes, the health and well being of the local community, nation and world, also improves. Many charities provide basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Countless others support crucial programs in education, health (and health research), the arts, the environment, and disaster relief.

Financial giving is the easiest way to support a charity. In 2008, gifts from individuals (or households) were a staggering \$229 billion—which is nearly 75 percent of all contributed

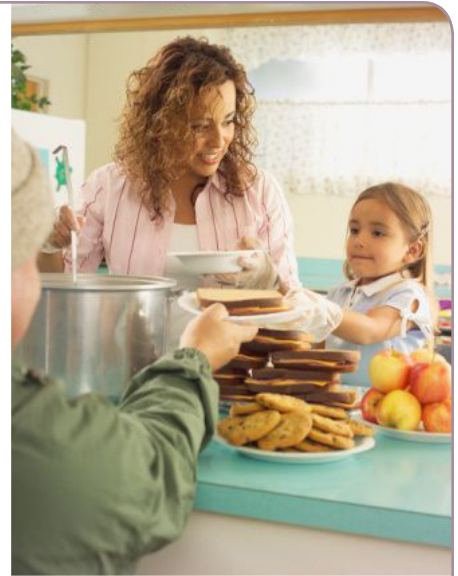
dollars. This is a tremendous example of the generosity of Americans, and our desire to help one another.

People often give money when directly asked at church, work, through schools, or by the community. They also give indirectly when they buy a product or attend an event (such as a sports game, concert, or special dinner) that includes a “donation” built into the price.

Many families and individuals take a proactive approach to giving by making regular contributions to one or several causes. Families often involve their children so they can learn the value and enjoyment of helping others.

Donating unwanted clothing, coats, books and household items to churches, civic groups, or others is another way to support a charity—and reduce clutter in your home. Unwanted items can always be brought into any Salvation Army store or given to groups such as the Vietnam Veterans of America (which will pick up furniture or other items right at your home).

Some people enjoy putting their hobbies to good use. Many run or walk in charity races, including the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure (which serves as a great motivator to increase exercise). Knitting groups, sewers and crafters hand-make countless scarves, mittens, hats and clothing that are given to charity. Many other in-kind services and products are donated by individuals and businesses every day in our state.



For those on tight budgets, or looking for greater involvement, time is always a welcome donation—and is a way for each of us to stay active, meet people, do something different, and serve a greater purpose. Charities need an incredible amount of manpower for day-to-day operations, fundraising, or during special events held throughout the year.

Lastly, there is one thing each of us can donate that is totally free, takes just a few minutes of our time, and will literally help save a life: our blood. According to the Red Cross, someone is in need of blood every minute of every day. Currently, only 3 out of every 100 people in America donate blood—so there is a huge number of potential blood donors who can join the ranks of “generous, strong and decent people, bound by beliefs beyond themselves.”

People often support a charity for personal reasons. Perhaps they went through a crisis such as an illness or homelessness. Or, they knew a child who did not have a warm winter coat. Or they wanted to clean up a park in their town. The reasons really are not important; what matters is the act of supporting something greater than our own selves—and enjoying the many benefits every day of the year! 