

## GIVING IS GOOD FOR YOU

### HOWEVER BEFORE YOU GIVE YOU MUST BE ASSURED THAT YOU HAVE TAKEN CARE OF YOURSELF AND FAMILY

Studies, including a five year one done with the support of the US government, have shown some pretty amazing benefits, including: lower blood pressure, increased self-esteem, less depression, lower stress levels, longer life, and greater happiness.

In reference to the 5 year study that looked at almost 900 people, Michael J. Poulin of the [University at Buffalo](#) said, "This study offers a significant contribution to our understanding of how giving assistance to others may offer health benefits to the giver by buffering the negative effects of stress."

Let's face it, you could have guessed that a helpers high would have included the increase in self esteem and the greater happiness. These accompany giving of any kind and we've all felt it. That moment where someone is opening a gift that you've given and you know that it's a home run. *(think of a grandparent making a gift to a young grandchild or the gift of time)*

Here's the thing though, there is a lot of serious medical back up for all of this happiness, as the act of giving activates the parts of the brain that are associated with both pleasure and trust. These areas release chemicals that make us feel good. These chemicals include serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin.

In fact, the National Institute of Health decided to study MRI's of people who gave to charity. During this study, they saw that the act of giving stimulates the mesolimbic pathway that is located in the reward centre of the brain, where endorphins are released. In fact, the areas that "light up" in the brain are the same as those that light up after making love, eating something delicious or winning a lottery.

One of the other effects is stress relief. This one can't be overlooked. As we have all experienced, stress and stressful situations often leave us feeling depleted and drained. Therefore, any form of stress relief can clearly lead to positive effects on our health. Poulin points out that the study addressed this aspect of giving – "As the title of our study indicates we tested the hypothesis that providing help to others would predict a reduced association between stress and mortality for the helpers. Specifically, over the five years of the study, we found that when dealing with stressful situations, those who had helped others during the previous year were less likely to die than those who had not helped others.'

On the more surprising side in that list of benefits, [The International Journal of Psychophysiology](#) published a study that stated that those who give their time and their the money it support others had lower blood pressure than those who didn't and even went so far as to find that it was helpful for people recovering from coronary related events.

Pretty unbelievable right? But who are we to argue with the International Journal of Psychophysiology.

That's not the only intriguing study on the subject either. The fine people at [University of California Berkeley](#) found, through a study of their own, that this Helper High can actually make you live longer. Their study, which focused on people 55 years and older, found that those who were volunteering for 2 or more organizations were 44 percent less likely to die over a 5 year period as opposed to those who did no volunteer work whatsoever. UC Berkley made sure that their study even accounted for other major factors such as age, level of activity, overall health and other negative habits like alcohol consumption and smoking.

[The University of Michigan](#) conducted its own research which backed up the Berkley study that looked at elderly people who gave to their family friends and neighbors as well as spouses, versus those who didn't.

So, there you have it. Giving makes you live longer and feel better. But, let's say you don't believe me, or the many studies, why not run your own personal study and donate to a great local charity!!

Even if you did believe the study, make a donation anyways, and enjoy your helper high, be warned, it can be addictive!

## **Taking Care of Yourself First**

Our feelings and instincts when it comes to money are at times wrong!

For example: the biggest fear for many people is outliving their resources or the possibility of changing their lifestyle that they have become accustomed to living.

For some this is a legitimate fear and for many others it is not. More about how our feelings cannot be relied on when it comes to money will be discussed in week 8 of "It's Your Money."

For those who are concerned and worried about outliving their resources it is time to consider doing a financial plan.

We need to get our frontal cortex involved (thinking part of the brain.) We need to take a look at our data: net worth, create a balance sheet, review our Social Security n Pension income, income taxes, spending habits, health insurance, long term care needs, our goals and objectives with a date certain n dollar cost and any other relevant information.

When we have all of our data together we "run" the numbers and do projections of the best, middle and worst case scenarios.

We sit down with a professional and analyze the data to determine the advantages and disadvantage of your possible choices.

If you have children who are not yet financial adults (no matter what age) we throw this into the mix to be discussed.

If everything looks good we begin to figure out if you can spend more during your life on travel, dinners out, gifts to grandchildren and charity, upgrade the kitchen, purchase a new car, etc. It is very difficult for many people to spend money!

And then you have a choice on how you want to pass on your values (education, health care, politics, animals, environment, music, homeless, etc.) through your estate plan to a charity that reflects your values.

For example; you cannot afford or desire to give anything to any charity during your lifetime. Then you may want to consider naming a charity in your Trust or Will. The charity receives nothing until your death. You have the good feeling today and the money will be delivered later.

You have a stock that is not paying you a dividend or a small dividend and you need to increase your income. You may consider a charitable gift annuity (CGA) or charitable remainder trust (CRT) and receive a substantial income tax deduction plus increase your income. All to be discussed in week 5 in the It's Your Estate series.

In week 2 we discuss the financial products that are most commonly sold and how to recognize a sales person versus a financial advisor. Sales folks (brokers) are unlikely to recommend a charitable product because there is never a sales commission or ongoing fees.

In week 3 and 4 we discuss financial planning how it should be done! Yes, we will discuss investing in stocks and bonds as well. And your investment decision here is very much driven by your data!