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# Bringing warmth to the world



Mental Health

The cold winter months often cause reclusive habits that may have a negative impact on your mental health. You're more likely to curl up with a warm blanket and watch your favorite show instead of interacting with others. But spring brings warmer weather, inviting greenery, and more opportunities to connect. As the world thaws, there are more ways to bring warmth into your personal life and improve your mental health. One opportunity that you may want to consider is volunteerism.

Volunteering in your community is a great way to improve your mental well-being. It checks off a few self-care needs that are related to happiness. For example, volunteering may improve your spiritual health. Spiritual health can involve engaging in activities that give you a sense of purpose and fulfillment in life. The act of volunteering may give you a sense of meaning and appreciation.

Giving back to the community may also help you connect and bond with others. Social connections are important for your mental health. Working next to someone with a common goal helps your community and provides more opportunities to socialize. Dedicating time as a volunteer can expand your social network and social skills. One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to participate in a shared activity and goal.

If you choose to volunteer, you may want to consider your motivation behind it. Selfless volunteering can foster more life satisfaction. Giving your time because you want to will have a greater positive effect on your health compared to those who feel obligated to volunteer. If you view your volunteerism as a burden, find something else you enjoy.

Volunteering has a profound effect in many ways. It can give us a sense of purpose, reduce stress, increase social connectedness, and offers numerous health benefits. Finding something that you are passionate about is essential for these benefits to come to fruition. Additionally, at the very least, you are making the world a better place, and that may give you something to smile about.



## Tips for improving your mental health

Volunteerism has been shown to have many mental health benefits, but there are other activities that also improve mental health. Consider the tips below to spring into better mental health this month:



**Try a relaxing activity.** Make time for a calming hobby such as meditation, painting, journaling, or anything else that makes you happy.



**Practice gratitude.** Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for. Be specific. Write them down at night or replay them in your mind.



**Focus on positivity.** Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts. Replace them with good, happy thoughts.



**Stay connected.** Reach out to your friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help.

# Unstructured kindness

You do not have to be rigidly structured and organized about your kind actions to make the world a better place. Making an intentional effort to bring more goodness into the world through small acts of kindness can help more than you realize. Here are few examples and benefits of unstructured kindness:

**Random acts of kindness may increase hope.** Carrying groceries for a neighbor, opening doors, or buying lunch for the needy are a few examples of kind actions you can take that benefit your community. Often, these random acts become reasons for people to have a restored faith in humanity. Each day presents a new opportunity to perform an act of kindness, so ask yourself what you are going to do today.

**Small acts of kindness go a long way.** An act of kindness doesn't have to be elaborate. Small gestures such as smiling or laughing with a stranger remind us that there are safe and kind people in this world, and you can be one of them. The simple act of smiling goes a long way for yourself too. Each time you smile, you throw a little feel-good party in your brain. The act of smiling activates neural messaging that benefits your health and happiness.

**Kindness is good for your health.** Kindness has been shown to increase self-esteem and empathy, and improve mood. It can also decrease blood pressure and cortisol, a hormone that directly impacts stress levels. People who are more kind and giving tend to be healthier and live longer.



**Mental kindness is also important.** We wear lenses that shape our interpretation of other people's actions. We can choose to see these actions in a positive light or in a negative one. A kinder point of view centers on the belief that everyone is doing the best they can. Assuming the best about others, or approaching the situation with more understanding, allows you to show up as curious and kind.

It's easy to make choices based on anxiety, depression, or anger. Intentionally choosing kindness helps us make sure that the world feels our presence in the very best of ways. No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

Sources: [APA.org](https://www.apa.org), [MayoClinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org), [PsychologyToday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com)

## Additional resources

Watch this [video](#) to learn how to be kinder to yourself and learn coping skills.

Read [personal stories](#) about mental health awareness and struggles.

[Online screening tools](#) are available to help you understand your mental health and how to address it.

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## Thinking about volunteering?

Figuring out the best way to volunteer can seem daunting. With a world full of need, where do you start? Begin with these questions to decide if volunteering is right for you, or to help determine how you would like to volunteer.

1. Do I currently feel fulfilled?
2. Am I interested in volunteering?
3. What problem in the world or community bothers me the most?
4. What skills and abilities do I have that can help improve that problem?
5. What organization can I contact about helping with this problem?
6. Who would I ask to join me? (You are more likely to stick with it if you volunteer with acquaintances, friends, or family.)