

The Physiological Power of Altruism

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The Atlantic:

In the fight against the disease that will kill one of every four people you know, most scientists studying cardiovascular epidemiology at Harvard School of Public Health are focusing on usual suspects like cholesterol, obesity, and cardiac structure. But research fellow Eric Kim has a unique focus: purpose in life. How does it affect health, how is it gained and lost, and how can it be weaponized to keep people alive and well?

When Canadian tenth-graders in a recent study began volunteering at an after-school program for children, the high schoolers lost weight and had improved cholesterol profiles compared to their non-volunteering peers. (Even in Canada, teenagers have cholesterol problems.) In the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*, the researchers concluded, “Adolescents who volunteer to help others also benefit themselves, suggesting a novel way to improve health.”

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His collaborator on the study, Sara Konrath, is the director of the Interdisciplinary Program on Empathy and Altruism Research at Indiana University’s Lilly Family School of Philanthropy (the world’s first school dedicated to the study of philanthropy, aptly named for the generous donors who made it possible).

Read the whole story: [The Atlantic](#)