

## November: Being Thankful and Happy



If you'd like to be happier -- who wouldn't? -- the first step may be to challenge your own views about happiness. Maybe you think that to be happier, you need more than you have now -- more freedom, more money, more love ... fill in the blank. Or maybe you've convinced yourself that this is as good as it gets.

There's more to happiness than racking up pleasurable experiences. In fact, helping others - the opposite of hedonism - may be the most direct route to happiness, notes Stephen G. Post, PhD, co-author of "Why Good Things Happen to Good People: The Exciting New Research That Proves the Link Between Doing Good and Living a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life."

When people help others through formal volunteering or generous action, about half report feeling a "helper's high" and 13% even experience alleviation of aches and pains, says Post, professor of preventive medicine and director of the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics at Stony Brook University in Stony Brook, N.Y. For most people, just one or two hours each week or doing five generous things weekly makes a difference.

First documented in the 1990's, mood elevation from helping is associated with a release of serotonin, endorphins - the body's natural opiates - and oxytocin, a "compassion hormone" that reinforces even more helping behavior, Post says.

Compassion engages us with others, removes isolation, builds resilience, and leads to deep fulfillment. Without compassion, happiness is simply short-lived pleasure. Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, may have said it best: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion; if you want to be happy, practice compassion."

The attached article, "**The Weigh to Show Gratitude**" tells us more specifically about how gratitude helps improve our attitude and contentment.

[The Weigh to Show Gratitude](#)

