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Giving Back During the Holidays Boost Health by Giving and Volunteering

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The old adage, "Tis better to give than receive," rings truer each year, but studies now show that the act of giving can actually protect and even improve one's health. People who are socially aware and active tend to experience better health, have lower mortality rates and have better self-esteem and confidence.

An Arizona State University study recently revealed that frequent "givers" experience an endorphin coined the "helper's high." This reduces stress hormones in the body, which improves cardiovascular health, boosts immunity, and lowers the risk of cancer, osteoporosis, stroke and depression.

Research from Ontario Ministry of Health revealed that volunteering can improve self-esteem, reduce blood pressure and combat social isolation.

Chiropractors nationwide are partnering with the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots program. In 2007, Toys for Tots gave gifts to more than six million U.S. children. Donating toys to this program gives families the opportunity to bring the joy of the season to less fortunate children.

Get the entire family involved by shopping with the children. Ask them to pick out toys they would want and explain how some children are less fortunate. Encourage them to donate their own allowance or savings. This will make them feel like

they are really contributing. Other ideas for holiday volunteering include:

- Angel Tree is a prison ministry program that provides holiday gifts for the children of men and women in prison.
- Adopt a family for the holidays. Send or make a special meal, bring decorations, and give a gift card for the parents to buy their own gifts for the children.
- Consider giving gifts to the elderly residents at a nursing home. Many of these people don't have family nearby.
- Join the Samaritan's Purse charity stuff box for Operation Christmas Child or help organize and distribute gifts to community locations.
- Sponsor a child through monthly pledges with an international organization year round. Make a scrapbook of pictures and letters from your sponsored child to remind everyone of a shared joyous experience.
- To honor a loved one, in lieu of gifts this holiday season make a charitable donation in their memory.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or shelter as a family. Make it a family tradition to participate in this act of kindness.

During the holidays this year, teach your family the value of giving your time, talents and resources. It just might save your life—or at least make it better!