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Can helping other help you feel better?

A study conducted by Michael Steger, a psychologist at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, suggests that perhaps engaging in meaningful activities, such as helping others, listening to friend's problems or pursuing one's life goals can actually help a person to feel happier.

In the study, Steger and his colleagues asked a group of 65 undergraduates to complete an online survey each day for three weeks that assessed how many times a day they participated in hedonic (pleasure-seeking behaviors), versus meaningful activities (helping others). The survey asked participants how much purpose they felt their lives had each day and whether they felt happy or sad. Participants also completed two sets of questionnaires at the beginning and end of the study to assess how they felt about their lives more generally. The study found that the more people participated in meaningful activities, the happier they were and the more purposeful their lives felt. Pleasure seeking behavior did not make people happier.

"A lot of times we think that happiness comes about because you get things for yourself," said Richard Ryan, a psychologist at the University of Rochester, who was not involved in the study. But "it turns out that in a paradoxical way, giving gets you more, and I think that's an important message in a culture that's pretty often getting messages to the opposite effect." Perhaps you can make a difference in the life of someone around you and, in return, feel more satisfied with your own life. Feeling like you've made a difference in the world can be a powerful tool of encouragement. Take some time today or in the future to help someone along their path, and perhaps find purpose and satisfaction in your own life.

Source:

Wenner, M. (2007, May 4). Study: Doing Good Makes You Feel Good. Retrieved May 20, 2015, from http://www.livescience.com/4443-study-good-feel-good.html