



Giving versus getting: What brings genuine joy during the Christmas season
By: Stephy Mahoney

The holiday season is highly associated with gift-giving. While unwrapping a gift from a loved one undoubtedly sparks joy, experience and research show that giving gifts creates a more lasting sense of fulfillment for us as humans.

Studies consistently find that generosity brings emotional benefits to both the giver and receiver. A 2008 study published in *Science*, titled "Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness," found that people tend to experience increased happiness when spending money on loved ones rather than themselves.

"Our findings suggest that personal spending isn't as satisfying as giving to others," says study co-author Elizabeth Dunn, a psychology professor at the University of British Columbia. This theory aligns with the age-old saying, "It is better to give than to receive."

The science behind this lies in the brain's chemistry. Acts of generosity activate parts of our brain associated with social connection and pleasure, releasing endorphins and dopamine—chemicals that create a "helper's high" and boost mood and behavior.

Dr. Molly Crockett, a neuroscientist at Princeton University, said, "When we give to others, our brains reward us with feelings of satisfaction, a natural reinforcement for prosocial behavior."

Her team also studies multiple behavioral conditions year-round in the Crockett Lab.

Beyond individual happiness, giving helps foster community spirit and enhance relationships. A thoughtful gift communicates your love and appreciation for another person. It is not just about the money you spend but about strengthening bonds with friends and family.

According to a report by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, "Giving is a powerful way to build trust and cooperation in relationships, as it reflects genuine concern for the recipient's well-being."

Additionally, the benefits of giving aren't confined to material gifts. Volunteering your time and donating to charities during the holiday season can also lead to greater levels of satisfaction.

A 2013 study published in the *Journal of Economic Psychology* revealed that people who donated felt significantly happier than those who didn't, regardless of their financial situation or the amount they donated.

It is also important to note the tension behind your reason to give. Gifts given out of obligation do not produce the same emotional rewards. Genuine generosity is driven by love and a desire to help.

Whether it's time spent helping others, a heartfelt present, or a small act of kindness, giving is a profound way to connect with loved ones and feel more satisfaction from doing nice things for others than from receiving something yourself.