



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Helping People, Changing Lives: 3 Health Benefits of Volunteering

Adapted from Angela Thoreson, LICSW

Volunteers make an immeasurable difference in people's lives and often serve to help others. Did you know that volunteering can benefit your health as well?

The good news is that you don't need to be a philanthropist or senator to enhance or create change in your community. Volunteering makes an immeasurable difference in people's lives. Your actions, big or small, can help others and benefit your health.

Research has shown that volunteering offers significant health benefits, especially for older adults, including:

1. Improves physical and mental health.

Volunteer activities keep people moving and thinking at the same time. Research has found that volunteering among adults, age 60 and over, provided benefits to physical and mental health.

Volunteers report better physical health than nonvolunteers. Research also has shown that volunteering leads to lower rates of depression and anxiety, especially for people 65 and older.

Volunteering reduces stress and increases positive, relaxed feelings by releasing dopamine. By spending time in service to others, volunteers report feeling a sense of meaning and appreciation, both given and received, which can have a stress-reducing effect. Reduced stress further

decreases the risk of some physical and mental health problems, such as heart disease, stroke, depression, anxiety and general illness. In addition, people who volunteer have lower mortality rates than those who do not, even when controlling for age, gender and physical health.

2. Provides a sense of purpose and teaches valuable skills.

The work that volunteers provide is essential to everyday activities, giving volunteers a sense of purpose, especially when giving their time and talent in the areas they find meaningful. Older volunteers experience greater increases in life satisfaction and self-esteem.

3. Nurture new and existing relationships

Volunteering increases social interaction and helps build a support system based on common interests. One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to participate in a shared activity.

In many cases, volunteers have diverse backgrounds, which helps expand their social network and allows them to practice social skills with others.

People volunteer for different reasons, such as exploring careers, sharpening skills, staying active during retirement, meeting new people and serving their communities. Yet all volunteers share a common desire to improve the health and welfare of people in their communities.

April is National Volunteer Month (adapted from Volunteer.gov)

Held in April every year, National Volunteer Month is a time to celebrate and recognize the contributions of volunteers. It is an opportunity to join the impact

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of volunteerism and encourage more people to get involved in their communities. This is a great month to reaffirm your commitment to giving back.

Getting started.

Identify your interests. Explore the volunteer opportunities offered and align them with your passions. Whether it's wildlife, history, recreation, education, or cultural preservation, Volunteer.gov has something for you!

Consider your skills and availability. How much time can you commit? What skills and talents can you offer? Matching your strengths and availability to the needs of a site will create a mutually beneficial partnership.

Find locations nearby. Locate the nearest field office or visitor center and inquire about their volunteer programs, sharing any specific interests. Or, you might want to look for opportunities at a dream destination for your next vacation.

Sign up and commit. Apply for one or many opportunities that match your interests! When selected, commit to showing up reliably and enthusiastically.

Your path to making a difference.

Once you've found an opportunity that resonates with you, lean into the fulfillment that comes with volunteerism. Remember, every contribution matters, your enthusiasm is contagious, and don't forget to embrace the opportunity to learn. Your passion for the outdoors, history, and culture is invaluable and your efforts will make a difference for future generations.

National Volunteer Month is a wonderful reminder that even small acts of kindness can have a profound impact.

References:

<https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/3-health-benefits-of-volunteering>

<https://www.volunteer.gov/s/article/National-Volunteer-Month#:~:text=Held%20in%20April%20every%20year.get%20involved%20in%20their%20communities.>

