

Volunteering Feels Good and is Good for You

By Tony Omernik, from Secrets of the Happiest Retirees

Would you be surprised if your doctor prescribed volunteering at your next visit? You really shouldn't. Volunteering as part of your plan for good health is being recommended by physicians to their patients. Even in our in our local community, I have had volunteers tell me that besides enjoying their volunteering, it was something their doctor suggested they do.

In the past three decades research has shown that volunteering has many health benefits for the volunteer. In fact, there have been over 50 studies published on the connection between altruism and physical and mental well-being. We can all relate to that good, warm feeling we get inside when we help someone or do something good. That good feeling is just part of a much larger spectrum of the many health benefits of volunteering, which include both physical and mental health benefits.

More specifically, a report by the Corporation for National and Community Service, The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research shows that volunteers have "greater longevity, higher functional ability, lower rates of depression and less incidence of heart disease." In addition, those who volunteer report an increased sense of accomplishment and purpose in their lives. The studies repeatedly found that volunteering leads to improved physical and mental health. In fact, it only takes about 100 hours per year, or about two hours a week to enjoy significant health benefits of volunteering.

Data has shown that older adults reap the greatest health benefits. This is attributed to the sense of purpose and social role which volunteering provides. For individuals over 70 who volunteer 100 hours a year, the data shows less decline in health and functioning levels, less depression and increased longevity.

Doing good, feels good and is good for you! While your gift of time and talents is helping to build a better community – you're also improving your health and happiness.