

How to Live Longer and Better...

An excellent way, it turns out, is to spend some of our free time as a volunteer! In a University of Michigan study, men who volunteered were two-and-a-half times more likely to live longer than men who did not volunteer.

In fact, it has been discovered that the benefits of spending time helping others compare with the benefits of exercise. Volunteering boosts levels of endorphins, brain chemicals thought to be responsible for the "runner's high", according to several recent studies.

Endorphins can also relieve pain and stress, and may be involved in lowering blood pressure levels, in addition to increases in self-esteem. It is also thought that the release of endorphins boosts the immune system. Fewer colds and upset stomachs were reported in 90 percent of adults who volunteered at a minimum of once of week, in a large survey of older adults.

So what are you waiting for? Besides the health reasons, volunteering also benefits people in other ways:

- apply existing skills and gain some new ones
- meet new people and make new friends
- feel the personal satisfaction of helping others
- feel needed and appreciated
- help make a difference in our community.

Volunteering is an enriching experience in so many ways. It can even help relieve stress and affect our mental well-being. Research has shown that for people over 60, mental alertness and abilities are maintained, and symptoms of depression are alleviated through the act of helping others and impacting their lives in a positive way.

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