



Top 10 reasons to volunteer

Volunteering is as beneficial to you as it is to the causes you care the most about. If not, here are ten reasons to volunteer:

- 1. Volunteering is good for your mental health.** Volunteering helps people manage and lower their stress levels. Volunteering also improves their mood. Volunteers also scored higher than non-volunteers on emotional well-being measures including overall satisfaction with life.
- 2. Volunteering is good for your physical health.** Volunteers feel that they have greater control over their health. Volunteers tend to be more engaged health care consumers who make better informed decisions about their health. Volunteering also keeps you active and has been shown to reduce chronic pain and heart disease symptoms.
- 3. Volunteering is good for your self-confidence.** Want to feel better about yourself and what you can do? Want to feel more satisfied with your life? Volunteering can boost all of the above and instill a greater sense of pride and identity.
- 4. Volunteering can fight depression.** Social isolation is a risk factor for depression. Volunteering helps you to develop relationships and a support system, both of which can help you overcome obstacles and fight depression.
- 5. Volunteering expands your social network.** Volunteering can help you make new friends and expand your social network. Personal connections, socializing and numerous opportunities to get together to pursue a common goal can also lead to a deeper sense of community.
- 6. Volunteering can help you develop new skills.** From interpersonal skills to teamwork, time management, organizational and other professional skills, volunteers must often acquire new skill sets as part of their volunteer work. These are also valuable to employers.
- 7. Volunteering can help you put existing skills to work.** Many volunteers appreciate being able to contribute their talents in a meaningful manner. Whether you have business skills the organization needs or have a unique talent that needs an outlet, volunteering is a great way to put your existing skills to work.

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- 8. Volunteering can advance your career.** Volunteering can provide with networking opportunities and job-related contacts.
- 9. Volunteering can expose you to new career options.** Volunteering is a great way to try out different job roles and industries. Many people have found their true calling after volunteering.
- 10. Volunteering can make a difference in causes that are important to you.** In addition, volunteering can help you to contribute to causes that are close to your heart. Whether you've lost a loved one to a devastating disease or have been moved to do something to ease the pain and suffering of others, your volunteer work can improve the lives of others while simultaneously delivering all of the above benefits.

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Helping elders stay active

Over the last few decades, researchers have begun to build a case for what most of us have long suspected: age is a state of mind. Staying involved — physically, socially and intellectually — is one of the best ways to stay young in body and spirit. Support of loved ones can go a long way in helping older relatives and friends tap in to the fountain of youth. Encourage older loved ones to:

Keep fit. Working out isn't just for the young. Moderate physical activity for 30 minutes, three times a week can prevent bone density loss and improve circulation, appetite and mobility. A short walk, tai chi or a fitness class geared to older participants are all great, gentle ways for seniors to stay energized. Be sure to consult a physician before starting any new exercise program, particularly where limiting factors exist.

Stay safe. Install handrails, ramps, slip-resistant mats, adequate lights and other safety devices to help less agile seniors get around independently, safely and easily at home.

Socialize. Investigate senior's day programs at community centers and places of worship. From painting classes to language lessons, sing-alongs to computer training, day programs give elders a chance to get out of the house and mingle with people who have similar interests.

Get out. If your elder is not able to drive, offer to "chauffeur" him or her to doctor's appointments, the mall or day programs from time to time. If this isn't possible, look into local volunteer and agency-based transportation services.

Connect with the family. Set up a regular visiting time for the family to get together. If relatives live further away, e-mail, phone or write on a regular basis and make an effort to gather for major holidays or celebrations.

Contribute. Volunteering is a great way for seniors to maintain a connection to the community and feel that they're making a contribution. Whether it's packing boxes at the local food bank, reading stories to children at the library or assisting new immigrants with language skills, helping others feels good at any age.

By taking an active role in an elder's life, you'll help ensure they're getting the support they need to stay active, healthy and energized. You'll also benefit from a closer relationship with the elder, and may even learn a lesson or two about remaining young at heart along the way.

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