

This surprising activity is associated with lower blood pressure and a longer lifespan

When you think about activities that help with stress, depression and even physical health, a variety of ideas may come to mind: yoga, meditation or even a trip to the gym. But research shows another activity is also associated with positive health benefits: volunteering.

Studies have long shown that people who volunteer feel more socially connected, less lonely and less depressed. In fact, one study out of the UK surveyed more than 600 volunteers and found that almost half of study participants who had volunteered for more than two years said it made them feel less depressed. In addition, almost two-thirds of those surveyed said volunteering reduced their stress levels.

And the act of volunteering is not only gratifying for the mind, but also for the body.

A recent study from Carnegie Mellon University found that adults who volunteered on a regular basis were less likely to develop high blood pressure compared to those who didn't volunteer in the age group over 50.

Experts hypothesize the association could be a result of an increase in physical activity for an older population who may not otherwise be active. Or perhaps the link between volunteering and lower stress levels explains the physical health benefits.

And the benefits don't stop there; another study in the journal *Health Psychology* found that people who volunteered regularly for the right reasons lived longer. And it can even help with self-esteem and increase happiness. Research shows people who give their time have a greater sense of purpose and life satisfaction. Many volunteers agree.

Bottom line: volunteering is good for your head and your heart.

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Wishing you joy and good health,
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