Health benefits of volunteering

Source: Ken Culp III, principal extension specialist

Volunteering is a win-win for volunteers and the organizations they serve. In Kentucky 4-H and the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, our volunteers are invaluable to us, but they may not realize that volunteering may help them too.

Research suggests that volunteering can improve your physical and mental health.

Volunteering can decrease your risk for developing depression. This is particularly true for volunteers who are 65 years old and over. Volunteering increases social interactions, builds a support system and provides a sense of purpose as you help youth master new skills.

Along with lower levels of depression, volunteers can have less stress. Increased social interactions and stronger social networks help lower instances of stress. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people and form relationships through shared interests. Kentucky 4-H offers programs to interest all, so finding a way to help is easy.

Serving as a volunteer can help you stay physically and mentally active. In 4-H, our volunteers are always moving and doing and they benefit from it. One study reported that people who volunteered had better physical health than those who did not. This is particularly true for adult volunteers over 60 in the study, who reported improved satisfaction with life and positive changes in their health.

Volunteering may even extend your lifespan. Data from the Longitudinal Study of Aging found that volunteers often live longer than their counterparts, regardless of their physical health, age and gender.

More information on how to volunteer with 4-H is available at the (COUNTY NAME) Extension office.

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