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For a Good Life: Volunteer!

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What's a great way to help ensure healthy, active, and independent living throughout your life? Volunteering. Contributing to your family, peers and community by volunteering is important at every age. When individuals volunteer, they not only help their community but also experience better health in later years, whether in terms of greater longevity, higher levels of functioning or lower rates of depression.

There are a **range of studies (http://www.nationalservice.gov/serve-your-community/benefits-**

volunteering) that consistently demonstrate that there is a significant relationship between volunteering and good health, in addition to the social benefits brought about by volunteering. For example, a report by UnitedHealth Group, *Doing Good is Good for You: 2013 Health and Volunteering Study* **(http://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/Social%20Responsibility/Volunteering.aspx)** , found that 76% of US adults who volunteer report that volunteering has made them feel physically healthier, and 78% report that volunteering lowers their levels of stress, leading to feeling better than adults who do not volunteer.

The study also found that feeling a deeper connection to communities and to others through volunteering has a positive impact on health, and that volunteers are more informed health care consumers, and more engaged and involved in managing their health. More than that, about a quarter of the people who had volunteered in the past 12 months said that volunteering has helped them to manage a chronic illness. Volunteering helps keep them physically active, and takes their mind off their own problems. So doing good for others IS good for you!

Volunteering is part of a healthy, active lifestyle. Just like eating right and getting regular exercise, learning to volunteer at a young age will contribute to a healthy life over time. United Way is engaged in **a number of projects (http://www.unitedway.org/our-work/health/)** aimed at increasing the number of youth and adults who are healthy and avoid risky behaviors, including connecting over 2.5 million people of all ages to volunteer opportunities every year.

As noted in *Doing Good is Good for You* **(http://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/Social%20Responsibility/Volunteering.aspx)** , "Good health starts with the individual. It means taking an integrated approach to wellbeing that includes not only our physical health, but our emotional health, our sense of purpose, our connections to our community and our overall quality of life." Good to keep in mind – at any age.

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