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Study: There are health benefits to volunteering



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While many baby boomers may not want to admit it, they are aging. Now one of their concerns is “How can we age well?”

Most people are aware of the importance of eating well and exercising. However, if I told you it may be possible to have a mortality rate 24 percent to 47 percent below that of your peers, would you be interested in learning more? Or, would you be interested in learning how you might be part of a group that, on average, spends 38 percent less time as patients in the hospital as they age?

Research suggests this type of health benefit isn't referring to some new, expensive medication. The benefits mentioned above actually come from new research conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health on the health benefits of volunteering.

Previous research showed how volunteers typically have fewer habits that negatively impact their health, such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol, and leading a sedentary lifestyle.

Building on this finding, additional research later showed that people who start volunteering increase their physical activity level, typically have fewer physical limitations and some people have measurable improvements in their heart health.

This new research also revealed that volunteers are much more likely to take advantage of preventative health opportunities such as cholesterol screenings, mammograms, prostate exams and flu vaccines.

The evidence of the health benefits of volunteering is overwhelming. In Central Kentucky, Lexington, you have many choices as to where or for whom you donate your time. There are places of worship, schools, athletic teams and, my favorite, hospitals.

Your skills and knowledge may be put to good use in surgery waiting rooms and gift shops, or as a way-finding guide in a variety of locations on a hospital campus. Medical knowledge or clinical experience isn't necessary for these volunteer duties.

You can learn about volunteer opportunities at Baptist Health Lexington at a free event at 10:30 a.m. March 19 in the hospital's Cancer Center lobby. Please RSVP by calling [859-260-6800](tel:859-260-6800).

Regardless of where you volunteer, it's time to get started so you can become a healthier you.

Dr. James L. Borders is chief medical officer for Baptist Health Lexington.

Read more here: <http://www.kentucky.com/living/health-and-medicine/article65909362.html#storylink=cpy>