

Volunteering may have benefits for memory among older adults

October 5 2016

A new research study has shown that volunteering regularly over time may have benefits for older adults. The study was published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

Older adult volunteers can help address many community needs. This study shows that [older adults](#) who volunteer, for example, enjoy better emotional and [physical health](#), and even tend to live longer than non-volunteers do. And there is a huge economic upside to [volunteering](#): the volunteer work that older adults perform generates some \$162 billion dollars toward the U.S. economy every year.

In this new study, Arizona State University researchers examined information collected from more than 13,000 people aged 60 and older between 1998 and 2012. At the beginning of the study and at two-year intervals, the research team asked participants if they'd spent any time in the past 12 months doing volunteer work for religious, educational, health-related, or other charitable organizations.

Researchers tested participants' abilities to remember, learn, concentrate, and make decisions. Participants were asked if they smoked, exercised, or had problems performing common daily activities. The researchers also collected information about the participants' physical health and whether they had symptoms of depression.

After analyzing the information gathered over the 14-year period, the researchers reported that older adults who volunteered—even at a single

point in time—showed a decreased risk for developing cognitive problems, even if they had other risk factors for cognitive impairment, such as smoking or being inactive.

People who volunteered regularly reduced their chances for developing [cognitive problems](#) by 27 percent.

The researchers stressed the need for more studies focusing on the benefits of volunteering for older adults. Specifically, studies examining why volunteering reduces one's risk for memory problems would be particularly useful, they said. The researchers also suggested that geriatrics healthcare professionals might consider writing "prescriptions to volunteer" for older adults under care.

"The benefits of volunteering extend beyond emotional and physical health. Volunteering helps people preserve their memory and their ability to think and make decisions as they age. Furthermore, our study shows that even for older adults who have never volunteered, newly engaging in volunteering over time also shows positive benefits," said study co-author Frank J. Infurna, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Arizona State University.

More information: "Volunteering is Associated with Decreased Risk for Cognitive impairment," *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. DOI: [10.1111/jgs.14398](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.14398)

Provided by American Geriatrics Society

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