Exploring the Benefits of Volunteering With COPD

by BRENDA VANTA

The Benefits of Volunteering, What Types are Best for COPD, and How to get Started

Have you volunteered lately? If not, you should consider starting to help others now.

It makes sense to feel good; you interact socially with others, serve a good cause, and feel worthy and gain additional senses of purpose in life. But did you know the benefits of volunteering go well beyond feeling good?

A number of scientific studies had been conducted to evaluate the benefits of volunteering. Here are a few conclusions.

Better Mental Health

People who volunteer feel more connected socially, and therefore can prevent isolation, stress and depression. Depression and COPD often go hand-in-hand, so it's important to reduce your risk.

Furthermore, some studies found that individuals who volunteer on a regular basis for altruistic reasons (mainly to help others rather than making you feel better) actually have an increased lifespan.

Better Physical Health

Not only will you feel better emotionally, but volunteering can actually improve your physical health, too. A study conducted by scientists from Carnegie Melon University reveals that volunteers have healthier blood pressure compared with those who don’t volunteer regularly.

As we know, high blood pressure correlates with an increased risk for heart diseases (including heart attacks), strokes, kidney and eye problems, as well as premature death. The more you improve your cardiovascular health, the better your lungs will function, as the heart and lungs are close both anatomically and physiologically.

Of course, volunteering in a physically active capacity will also improve your overall health and will keep your joints mobile. Researchers believe people who volunteer are also more likely to eat healthier and exercise which can partially explain the many health benefits of this activity.

How Much Time Should You Volunteer?

Research studies found that you need to volunteer regularly to fully benefit from it. The recommended time is around 100 to 200 hours a year.

The type of volunteer activity that can help you enjoy better physical and emotional health has not yet been studied. However if you have COPD, there are certain guidelines to stay within. Here are a few suggestions.

Plan carefully where and what kind of work you would like to do. For example, volunteering in a hospital may not be the best choice, as COPD sufferers can catch infections easier, and have more severe symptoms. A job that involves heavy lifting or other strenuous activities would not be suitable either.

However, you can do office jobs, handle telephone calls or organize charity events. Ask the head of the organization if can provide a few things that can help you with your COPD symptoms like a parking spot close to the entrance, or a work environment that is smoke- and dust-free with adequate ventilation.

Choose to work with someone who allows you to work flexible hours, so you can attend doctor’s appointments and family events as needed. Even better, try to do the volunteer work from home, and do phone calls or organize special events.