

HELP YOUR community AND YOUR HEALTH

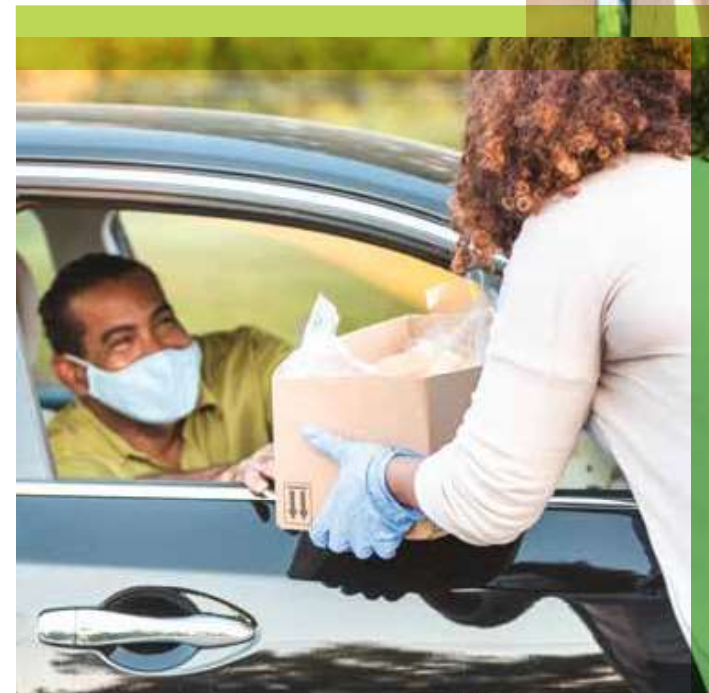
It's no secret that volunteers help communities in significant ways. But did you know that doing good for others is also good for your own health?

"Volunteering has an immense impact on your physical, mental, and social-emotional health," says Rhea Rowser, MD, a primary care physician with Kettering Health Network. Helping others can help your body, mind, and spirit.

Better for the body "Compared with nonvolunteers, people who volunteer have lower blood pressure, decreased stress levels, and live longer," says Dr. Rowser. If you are participating in an active volunteer opportunity, like cleaning up a community space or running errands for a senior neighbor, you are also working toward the World Health Organization's weekly physical activity recommendation of 150 minutes per week.

"When I volunteer, I pick causes that are near to my heart, like delivering meals to patients, but I also get the secondary benefit of physical activity," says Dr. Rowser. "People who participate in regular physical activity are at lower risk of developing obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease."

Jared Mueller, MSW, a licensed independent social worker with Kettering Health Network, says that the more engaged a person is with and for others, the more positively the body responds. "The key part of choosing a volunteer opportunity is to make sure it is meaningful to you," he continues. "If the 'why' of what you're doing resonates with you, you will be engaged physically, but also mentally and emotionally—strengthening the overall health benefits of volunteering."



A more focused mind Volunteering can not only help keep your body fit but also your mind sharp. "Volunteering keeps the mind healthy because it engages multiple parts of the brain, including the cortex, which is the main area of problem-solving," Jared explains. "Like a muscle, using your cortex strengthens its abilities, which helps you think more clearly and stay more aware."

A stronger spirit The midbrain controls a person's emotions, relationships, and attachments. Volunteering engages all three of those parts of the midbrain and can help you form stronger bonds with others. "Volunteering together unites people in a



common, 'heart-based' mission," says Jared. "These positive interactions not only strengthen the midbrain but create positive social connections."

Dr. Rowser agrees. "I love including my kids in my volunteer efforts," she says. "Not only is it an opportunity for our family to spend time together but also to model to the next generation the

importance of helping others. Volunteering exposes us to people in circumstances different from ours, and this makes us more empathetic, which is important for people of all ages."

Create a positive volunteer experience

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everyone and every sort of organization, including places that use volunteers. "In many cases, the need for volunteers is even greater," says Jared. "There are steps you can take to volunteer safely."

- **CHOOSE A VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH.** Many of the physical and mental health benefits will not be reaped if you are worried about your health and safety while volunteering. It is also important to make a time commitment that works with your schedule. "You don't have to go around the world or commit days of your week to make a difference," Dr. Rowser says. "Volunteering a few hours a week, or one or two mornings a month, will make a difference for your community and your health."
- **STAY CONNECTED.** We all tend to enjoy seeing the direct benefits of how our volunteering has helped others. Ask the organizations for whom you volunteer how you can keep up with the process, see pictures, watch videos, or hear the stories of those directly benefiting from your service.
- **SUPPORT FINANCIALLY.** Whether you are able to physically assist or not, organizations need financial resources to maintain their efforts. Supporting through financial contributions, while staying engaged with the organization, can help you see the fruits of your giving.

▼ A GIFT OF TIME

Visit ketteringhealth.org/volunteer to learn about volunteer opportunities with Kettering Health Network.