

**Don't Let Your Age Keep You From Volunteering**

from the American Counseling Association

Advertisers like to portray gray-haired seniors as smiling couples enjoying beautiful sunsets. Unfortunately, the reality is that getting older may bring numerous issues, problems and, often, lots of stress.

We all face stress, of course. Whether it's a school spelling test or an important business presentation, the result is worry and stress. But those types of stress have deadlines, after which the stress ends. One can also reduce such stress -- studying those spelling words again or rehearsing harder for that presentation.

But stress faced by an older person often has no set ending. Problems for seniors might be deteriorating health, an ill spouse, waning financial resources or fear of losing independence. Such ongoing issues can mean high stress levels in the face of problems usually impossible to make disappear. The result can be serious depression, one of the most common health issues facing America's senior citizens today.

While many of the problems facing the elderly aren't avoidable, it's still possible to manage the stress and negative effects they can produce.

Mental health experts commonly advise seniors facing problems to try and live a more active life. That usually means more physically activity and having a more fulfilling social life.

Getting more exercise isn't difficult, but does require dedication to make it happen. But creating a more active social life can be a challenge for many people. And that's where volunteering can make a real difference.

Regardless of where one lives, there most likely are numerous volunteer opportunities. Some may call on past skills, talents and work experiences, while others might allow you to learn new skills. Often it simply means being a helpful body when assistance is needed. But in all cases, volunteering provides an opportunity to meet new people, help others, and feel more positive about yourself -- all great stress reducers everyone can use.

Compared to taking on a new hobby or job, volunteering is usually quite easy. A call to your local school, hospital, YMCA, Red Cross, animal shelter or other non-profit will usually provide plenty of opportunities or suggestions. And there are online services, such as VolunteerMatch.com, that link volunteers to local non-profit needs.

Volunteering is a great way to stay active, get more involved, and reduce stress, regardless of your age. Find out who needs your help today and see how helping others can also really help you.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org*

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