Why Helping Others Helps with Your Own Health

Helping others can have a number of positive benefits, but there is definitely a caveat to it. As the somewhat recently developed saying goes, you still need to remember to "put on your own oxygen mask first." While good self-care is definitely important, a vital component of good self-care will always be to help others. Here are 4 ways in which helping others helps with your own health.

**1. It Can Help You Live Longer**

Research has shown that people who participate in volunteer efforts of some kind show an increase in their ability to manage stress, a decrease in the rate of depression and are even a lowered risk of serious disease. This may have to do with an increased sense of overall life satisfaction due to participating in something they feel to be important, as well as the strong community ties that many volunteers develop. These ties help to stave off loneliness, which has been shown to be a major factor in depression and can even weaken the immune system.

**2. It Lowers Your Blood Pressure**

While a healthy diet and exercise can go a long way towards reducing blood pressure, so can volunteering. One study found that elderly individuals who volunteer for as little as 200 hours a year (or roughly 4 hours per week) showed a whopping 40% decrease in hypertension. This most likely ties back into the same causes of better longevity: that helping others helps you develop deeper ties to a community which helps stave off the loneliness that can cause a number of resulting health issues.

**3. You Can Boost Your Mood**

Mental health issues such as chronic depression can result in a number of health issues. Helping others, however, has been shown to have a significant impact on the overall sense of well-being or "happiness" of individuals who regularly participate in some kind of volunteer efforts. Research is also pointing to biology itself rewarding us for good behavior by releasing a number of mood-boosting neurotransmitters every time we engage in some act of altruism.

**4. You Are Able to Reduce Pain**

In one study of individuals suffering from chronic pain, it was found that they actually experienced a reduction in their own pain when they helped their peers who also suffered from chronic pain. Even if you don't suffer from chronic pain, focusing on the needs of others can still help take your mind off what does ail you.

Helping others doesn't always necessarily have to happen through volunteering. Even individuals have found that doing something as simple as paying for the drink of the person behind you at the coffee bar can have a profound impact on your emotional well-being. Simply looking for opportunities to practice random acts of kindness can offer a significant boost to your overall health.