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Thankful Giving

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November is the month during which we take stock of our surroundings and express gratitude for everything we have been given. But besides family, friends and turkey, there is another gift that you may be overlooking: the opportunity to give back. Volunteering is not only good for the people you help; it's good for your health. Philanthropic interests are important for a healthy, balanced long life. Take a look at some of the amazing wellness benefits for do-gooders:

Healthy Giving

It's obvious enough that volunteer work will make you feel good about yourself. But did you know that it could alleviate chronic pain and improve your immune system? In fact, spending time on a worthy cause may increase self-esteem and endorphin production, lower blood pressure, help with insomnia and hasten surgery recovery time. Volunteering also facilitates intergenerational relationships and helps you forge connections with multiple circles of people. Having a strong support system can lower your chance of premature death and heart disease. More positive side effects: volunteering contributes to lifelong learning, activity and adventure; keeps you challenged; and provides a passion and an appreciation for life

The Next Big Thing

Volunteering is invaluable, and if you have extra time consider devoting more than just a few hours a week. No matter what your age is today, you can always find passion and renewal by committing to your "next big thing." Choosing to make your next big thing a charity or philanthropy offers more than a warm and fuzzy feeling of satisfaction. You may become an expert on inner city schools, or an encyclopedia about hunger and poverty issues in Central America. Whatever your chosen cause, you'll have opportunities to try new activities, travel to

new places and take on leadership roles. Once you commit to your next big thing, your appetite for learning, new experiences and helping others will grow, fulfilling your life in wonderful ways.

Volunteer Vacations

This winter or spring, consider forgoing that luxury cruise or wine tasting tour. Instead, hop on board one of the many cause-oriented getaways that are becoming increasingly popular. You can help build houses for Habitat for Humanity right here in the U.S., or travel abroad to work on projects for needy people and environments across the globe. There are opportunities for a variety of interests. Help excavate an ancient settlement high the Andes of Peru, trace the lifecycle of endangered butterflies in Japan or snorkel to help researchers survey coral reef health. Google "volunteer vacations" and you're sure to find something that suits your philanthropy fancy. If you have high school or college-aged children, encourage them to do the same. "Alternative Spring Breaks" are an affordable and worthy way to spend that infamous free week, and a great way to spend quality family time.

Take Action

It's easy to talk about volunteering, and even easier to put it off until "later." Even with the holidays fast approaching, right now is the perfect time to start giving back. Consider how donating just a few hours to a soup kitchen or reading to seniors will impact someone else's holiday season. As we all continue our 100 year journey through life, we realize that change happens one decision at a time. There's no better time than now to start the process of thankful giving!

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