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HEALTH

Volunteering reduces depression in retirement

Income and marital status also influence wellbeing in later-life

A new study from Columbia University has revealed the best way to improve your mental wellbeing in later life. The researchers behind the study discovered that volunteering reduces the risk of depression in retirees by as much as 43 per cent.

The researchers think volunteering provides social interaction and a sense of purpose, both of which contribute to an enhanced feeling of life satisfaction.

Depression is a serious health concern for the growing age group of people over 60, who form 17 per cent of the world's population. People who are depressed are far more likely to develop other chronic medical conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and higher blood pressure, which can all result in premature mortality.

The new study found that higher rates of depression were found in the 65–69 age group, while far lower rates were seen in the 70–74 group. The adjustment period around the average US retirement age of 62 could be to blame, when significant life changes contribute to depressive symptoms.

The 65-69 age group, according to other reports, often suffer increased physical health issues and a loss of social networks.

Volunteering can combat this isolation and contribute to a lower prevalence of depression, the researchers say. Yet the study also cites marriage as an important factor given the social support it offers, as well as social relationships more generally.

The odds were also in the favour of those with more wealth. Those who had annual household incomes of over $50,000 (around £40,000) were at a reduced risk of experiencing the condition.



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