

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Volunteering As A Way To Reduce Senior Stress

from the American Counseling Association

As we age, few of us are going to be one of those smiling, gray-haired, fictional people that advertisers love to show. The reality is that many older Americans find themselves facing a variety of issues and problems that can bring substantial amounts of stress to their senior years.

While any one of us can feel stress at any age, most stress-inducing events have a set deadline after which they end. A student might be anxious about an upcoming test, or a businessman worried about a presentation, but once the events pass they're over. And, for such stress, it's possible to take actions, like more studying or extra presentation rehearsals, that help address the problem.

But for an older person facing problems such as deteriorating health, caring for an ill spouse, a possible loss of independent living, or waning financial resources, the stress levels can be high, ongoing and often impossible to eliminate. The result can be serious depression, one of the most common health problems facing older Americans today.

While such stress-inducing issues don't just disappear, there are ways to manage stress and reduce the negative effects it can have on one's life.

The most common advice is to live a more active life. That usually translates as more physical activity and a more active social life.

Increased exercise may require dedication, but isn't difficult to achieve. Creating a more extensive social life, however, can be a challenge for many people. And that's where volunteering can make a difference.

From big cities to small towns there are always 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 for anybody.

While getting started can seem difficult, when it comes to volunteering it's usually 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 www.VolunteerMatch.com, that link volunteers to local non-profit needs.

Volunteering is a great way to stay active, be more involved, and reduce stress, regardless of your age. Find out who needs your help today.

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

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