Beyond the Holidays: Year-Round Volunteering

After the holidays, many charitable organizations seem to disappear as quickly as the decorations. While some groups may be more active during certain seasons, there are plenty of year-round volunteer opportunities to help you stay connected to your community.

Volunteerism has been associated with numerous health benefits, including reduced risks for depression, improved self-esteem, and an enhanced sense of purpose and meaning. One study showed that individuals who volunteered at least 200 hours over the past 12 months had lower blood pressure, highlighting the importance of being consistent with healthy behaviors when it comes to improving your health.

Whether you choose to volunteer your time or money, investing in giving back has the potential to improve not only your health, but the health of your community as well.

Here are a few ideas to help you connect with year-round volunteer opportunities in your area:

**Food Banks**
Check with your local food pantry to see if they need additional help. Many food banks rely on volunteers to help restock shelves, make deliveries, and ensure that food is stored safely.

**Hospice**
Hospice volunteers support patients who are in the final stages of life, along with their families. Since there are both direct care and non-direct care opportunities available, you do not have to have a health background to help.

**Animal Rescue Shelters**
Animal shelters and rescue organizations like the Humane Society International ASPCA have a wide variety of volunteer roles, from advocacy activities to field operations.

**Habitat for Humanity**
Building homes with Habitat for Humanity offers an opportunity to be physically active while you simultaneously connect with those in your community.

2. https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank
3. https://hospicefoundation.org/Volunteer
4. https://www.habitat.org/volunteer/near-you/find-your-local-habitat
An Eco-Friendlier Home

Put simply, eco-friendly⁵ homes are designed to have a limited impact on the environment⁶. That means they focus on renewable energy resources and are sensitive to the ecological consequences that come with building and maintaining a household. One of the most notable health benefits of eco-friendly products is that they create less waste, which means the positive impacts are seen far beyond the single-family home.

If you have been thinking about making your home more eco-friendly, here are a few ways⁷ to get started:

**Batteries**
Consider using rechargeable batteries to keep them out of local landfills, where they can break down and leach into the soil and drinking water.

**Grocery Bags**
Bring your own grocery bags to the supermarket to reduce the number of plastic bags that end up in the garbage. Similarly, mesh produce bags are washable and easier to use than the plastic bags found in most produce sections at the grocery store. They also come in handy at the farmers’ market.

**Straws and Water Containers**
The sad truth is that 91⁸% of plastics are not recycled. That is why opting for reusable straws and refillable water containers instead of plastic straws and bottles of water helps keep harmful plastics out of our oceans and landfills.

**Water-Saving Shower Heads**
Most individuals use about 2 gallons of water per minute⁹ taking showers. If you love taking long showers, that number can grow dramatically. One way to reduce water consumption is to install a water-saving shower head, but you could also install a simple timer to set limits on how much time you spend there.

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⁹. https://www.home-water-works.org/indoor-use/showers
Steps and Veggies at the Farmers’ Market

It is no secret that healthy eating and physical activity are integral to good health. Farmers’ markets offer a trifecta: healthy food, physical activity, and an opportunity to deepen connections with those in your community. While you are stocking up on nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables, you can simultaneously accumulate some steps while you visit with local growers and crafters.

To maximize the health benefits during your visit to the market, consider these strategies:

**Wear comfortable shoes**
Having the right footwear can make all the difference if you plan to cover some serious ground at the market. While many markets take place in parking lots, others are held in parks with uneven pavement or hilly areas, so having the right attire is key.

**Track your steps**
Using a pedometer or app to track your steps is a great way to maintain a consistent physical activity routine. It might also give you a boost of motivation to work in those last few steps before the end of the day or take another lap around the market.

**Freeze it**
If you happen to find some irresistibly good-looking produce, do not be afraid to stock up. When you get home, simply pop whatever you do not plan to use for the week in the freezer. Surprisingly, frozen produce often surpasses fresh produce in terms of nutrient quality. That is because the fresh produce found in supermarkets often spends a lot of time on a truck before it arrives at the store. In contrast, the produce found at farmers’ markets is harvested the morning of, or just a few days before, market day.

**Volunteer**
Another way to get involved with your local farmers’ market is to volunteer. Whether you support a grower, a nearby community garden, or help out with logistics at the event itself, you will have even more opportunities to cultivate meaningful relationships with your community.
Chicken Vegetable Soup

INGREDIENTS
• 1 1/2 cups chopped celery (1 stalk)
• 1/2 cup sliced leek or chopped onion
• 1/2 cup thinly sliced carrot (1 medium)
• 1 tablespoon butter or margarine softened
• 14 ounce reduced-sodium chicken broth
• 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
• 2 cups milk
• 1 tablespoon snipped fresh thyme or basil
• 1/4 teaspoon salt
• 1 1/2 cups chopped chicken or turkey (about 8 ounces)
• 1/4 cup dry white wine or reduced-sodium chicken broth
• Cracked black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS
1. In a large saucepan, cook celery, leek or onion, and carrot in hot butter until tender. In a medium bowl, gradually stir the 14-ounces of chicken broth into the flour; stir into vegetables in saucepan. Add milk, dried herb (if using), and salt. Cook and stir until slightly thickened and bubbly; cook and stir for 1 minute more.
2. Stir in chicken, wine or the 1/4 cup chicken broth, and fresh herbs (if using). Cook about 2 minutes more or until heated through.
3. To serve, ladle into soup bowls. Sprinkle with pepper.

Total Time (Cook and Prep):
35 minutes
Servings: 4

NUTRITION INFO
(per serving)
254 calories
10 g total fat (5 g sat. fat)
68 mg cholesterol
560 mg sodium
16 g carbohydrates
1 g fiber
23 g protein

Source:
Navigate Wellbeing Solutions Recipe Library

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