

## Not feeling useful

Not feeling useful can have a negative impact on longevity. What ‘useful’ is for older people can vary a lot. Some examples are:

### Working

A study of 70 year olds showed that working correlated with better perceived health, greater self-sufficiency and longevity.

### Volunteering

Volunteering has long been a contribution by older people. It appears that whether this affects their longevity depends on their motives. It has been suggested that increased longevity is dependent on the reasons for volunteering.

Volunteers who had altruistic reasons or wanted social connections were more likely to outlive those volunteering for personal satisfaction.

### Grandparenting

Grandparents who looked after their grandchildren lived significantly longer (on average) than those who did not.

### Common theme

Having a ‘useful purpose’ is a common theme across these examples.

- With working, useful purposes can be self-sufficiency, ongoing challenge and/or company
- With volunteering, it could be altruism or social connections
- Grandparenting involves social and practical support such as housekeeping. Two theories behind its impact are that looking after grandchildren requires grandparents to take more care of themselves, or perhaps the power of positive emotion – maybe both.

## How can we apply this?

This information shows links between ‘usefulness’ and longevity. This does not mean everyone should rush out and be useful according along the lines of these examples!

Many other activities could qualify as being useful, just as there are other activities which are not ‘useful’ but are reasonable choices and may also influence longevity.

Extending longevity may not be a primary goal for many people, but it’s worth remembering that the same factors that affect longevity often improve quality of life. The three examples show this.

Also, extension of longevity is often accompanied by less dependency.

### Next steps

**Working** – a rationale which may inform a decision to keep working is in our article on Personal Capital [here](#).

**Volunteering** – three barriers to volunteering emerged in a recent study:

- Not enough time and schedules are too inflexible
- Not enough information and most roles aren’t interesting enough
- No one has asked me

If you want to take the initiative and investigate doing volunteering in Australia, this is a link to [Volunteering Australia](#).

**Grandparenting** – good information is available [here](#)

A final thought: having a pet could also provide a focus of usefulness as well as pleasure – see the article on Pets [here](#).