



Spending Time in Nature Can Boost Your Health and Your Mood

Researchers continue to find more evidence that spending time in nature is good for both physical and mental health. Whether it's a walk in the woods, lying on the grass in your local park, listening to the sound of moving water, or noticing the smell of leaves and flowers, connecting with nature can reduce your stress, brighten your mood, sharpen your thinking, and even boost your immune system.

Here are some of the ways that bringing more nature into your life can improve your health and wellbeing, according to this growing body of research.

REDUCED STRESS

Whether you live with a view of trees out your window or spend time in parks, gardens, and other green spaces, exposure to plants, trees, and natural bodies of water has been found to reduce levels of stress and anxiety. Exposure to nature tends to lower your heart rate and blood pressure and reduce the level of cortisol (a stress hormone) in your

system. Natural environments can also help to pull people out of tension-building cycles of rumination.

BRIGHTER MOODS

Spending time in nature can make you happier—not just while you're out in it, but afterwards, too. Study participants reported more positive moods after spending time in nature when compared with people

who had spent time in non-natural environments. Walks in nature can be an effective supplement to other treatments for depression. One study using brain imaging gives a clue why this might be: After a walk in nature, an area of the brain associated with depression and anxiety when inactive showed increased activity.

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IMPROVED CONCENTRATION AND CREATIVITY

Something about time in nature restores the brain's ability to think clearly and creatively. People who spend time in nature score significantly higher on tests of concentration and creativity than people who don't. One theory is that a natural environment draws out a relaxed and unforced attention to a person's surroundings, giving the brain a chance to recharge for renewed focus and more open-minded thinking. In a related finding, children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are better able to concentrate after spending time in nature.

BETTER CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Exposure to nature, both in experimental situations and living environments, is associated with higher levels of kindness, generosity, and cooperation. People who live in buildings with trees and green space around them report having more and stronger social connections with neighbors than do people of similar demographics living in buildings without trees. In experiments, people exposed to beautiful plants or images of nature demonstrated more generous behavior than those who were not.

MORE ENERGY

Time outdoors in nature makes you feel more vital and energetic. It's not clear why this is, but one plausible explanation is that time in nature has a restorative and reinvigorating effect. One study monitored the brain activity of subjects while they walked in nature and found that the effects were similar to those of people engaged in meditation.

STRENGTHENED IMMUNE SYSTEM

The body's immune system is strengthened when people spend time in the woods or among trees. White blood cell counts go up, including the concentration of T-cells, which play an important role in fighting infection. The practice of "forest bathing"—spending time in the woods for health benefits—is common in Japan and is gaining acceptance around the world. The body's production of vitamin D is also boosted when you spent time outdoors in sunlight. Vitamin D may play a role in reducing the risk of osteoporosis, heart attacks, and some forms of cancer