

Health Benefits of Spending Time In Nature

By: Dominique Martin on June 22, 2018

As children, most of us had an innate fascination with nature. We would run, jump, and play among the trees and the grass, and find our curiosity piqued by the peculiar sounds of our natural surroundings. We all start off enchanted and fully engaged by nature, but as we transitioned through the stages the life—that childlike wonder began to wane. Fast forward to adulthood and the evolving developments of social media, television, cell phones, and a plethora of other electronic gadgets, and it's not difficult to see how staying plugged in has caused some disconnection.

This “plugged-in” lifestyle has many of us more sedentary than our hunter-gatherer ancestors and an average 90% of people living in the western hemisphere spend most of their time indoors. If you're a part of this percentile, it's not too late to reintroduce yourself to the rejuvenating powers of nature on the body, mind, and spirit.

Let's explore the health benefits of spending time in nature and how you can integrate those benefits into your lifestyle to experience optimal wellness and balance.

Nature's Effect On The Body and Mind

If you've ever had the pleasure of walking through the forest, going to the beach, or simply sitting in a park—then you have probably felt the healing effects that nature has on the body and mind. Time slows down, you become more aware of what's going on around you, and you generally feel less stressed than you were before.

This is no coincidence.

When you are outdoors in a vegetation-rich atmosphere and exposing your skin to the rays of the sun—your body begins to produce the feel-good hormone *serotonin*. This sends electromagnetic currents to the

brain and creates a calming effect within the entire ecosystem of your body.

It's undeniable that spending time in nature makes you feel good, but what other health benefits does it offer?

1. **Beneficial Sunlight.** When we expose our skin to sunlight, our body begins the process of creating and activating vitamin D. The sun offers the most natural source and regular exposure not only improves absorption of nutrients from the food we eat, but can assist our body in repelling colds and other viruses as well as bone degeneration, cancer, heart disease, depression, and many other ailments. All you need is 20 minutes of daily sunshine during peak times (11am-1pm), but even 5-10 minutes is enough time for you to soak up some of the goodness.
2. **Strengthened Immunity.** Studies have shown that when people spend time in natural surroundings, they experience increased immune function. Plants give off airborne chemicals called *phytoncides* that have antibacterial and antifungal qualities which help plants fight disease. When we breathe in these chemicals, our bodies react by multiplying the number and activity of a type of white blood cell called natural killer cells—which obliterate tumor and virus infected cells in our bodies. Lower concentrations of the stress hormone cortisol, decreased pulse rate, and lower blood pressure are added benefits of being among plant life.
3. **Mental Health Improves.** The psychological effect of immersing oneself in nature can act as therapy for those suffering from mental disorders. The visual aesthetic of nature itself is healing and it's been reported that people who regularly expose themselves to nature experience an increase in their sense of well-being, more energy, and feelings of stress and negativity diminished.
4. **Inspires Physical Activity.** If you've ever traveled to places like California, Oregon, or any location where forests and the ocean are prominent features, then I'm sure you have seen people biking, running, hiking or indulging in some other physical activity. When you live in an area with ample green space, you're more likely to get out and explore the scenery—and this can encourage you to be more active.

5. **We Breathe Better.** Trees and plants naturally improve air quality and reduce air pollution, so making a habit of spending time in green environments does wonders for the lungs since the air is cleaner. Fresh oxygen also has a revitalizing effect and can increase depleted energy levels more than coffee or any stimulant.

Ways To Increase Your Exposure To Nature

Increasing your exposure to nature can be as simple or adventurous as you want it to be. The purpose is to get you off the couch and out of the house, so that you can reap the magical benefits.

Here are some tips to encourage you to get outdoors:

- ❑ **Earthing.** Earthing has existed since the beginning of time and simply involves taking off your shoes and walking barefoot on grass, sand, dirt, or rocks. Walking barefoot connects the soles of our feet to Earth's energy and can diffuse inflammation, balance sleeping patterns, and generally improve overall well-being.
- ❑ **Walk Your Dog.** Pets are the perfect excuse to get outside. Walk your dog to park for some play and exercise. This will provide some physical activity for the both of you and much needed quality time.
- ❑ **Camping.** There's no better way to incorporate all the benefits of being outdoors than to head to the woods for some camping. Campgrounds can provide a myriad of outdoor activities such as fishing, hiking, swimming, biking, and even meditation. It offers you a way to completely focus on a hobby for a few days without external distractions.
- ❑ **Unplugging.** Spending too much time connected to your screen can significantly impact your well-being. Too much of anything causes imbalance, so incorporate a ritual of turning your phone (or notifications) off for a few hours and getting out to do something you enjoy. It'll give your body and mind a break from being constantly plugged in and provide some much deserved "me time".