

Eight reasons to LOVE CAMPING

Scientists are finding that waking up with the sun, building campfires and breaking your daily routine are all beneficial to health. Here's why ...

WORDS CELIA WOOLFREY

IT RESETS YOUR BODY CLOCK

1 Early nights with no artificial light and waking at sunrise resets your biological clock to a 24-hour cycle (it can drift to 25 hours or more indoors).

Researchers at the University of Colorado found that just one week's camping allows you to resynchronise your sleep cycle, leading to healthier kip and making it easier to wake up in the morning. Good-quality sleep puts you in a better mood, improves mental focus and lowers the risk of getting diabetes or becoming obese.

YOU DE-STRESS IN NATURE

2 "Spending time in green spaces reduces risk of cardiovascular disease and lowers blood pressure, heart rate and stress," says Caoimhe Twohig-Bennett, lead author of a report by the University of East Anglia. We can thank

phytoncides for this – organic compounds released by plants and trees. Even just a couple of nights camping in woods can lower cortisol levels and give an immune-system boost that lasts for a month.

IT BOOSTS VITAMIN D LEVELS

3 Our bodies produce vitamin D when we get UVB rays from direct sunlight on our skin. It's vital for bone and muscle health and promotes a healthy immune system and mood. Baring 10% of your body for 15-20 minutes daily – arms or lower legs should do it – is enough. So pottering around camp first thing in shorts and a T-shirt is ideal. You can apply sun cream afterwards, if needed.

GETTING MUDDY IS GOOD FOR YOU

4 "You're exposed to a diverse variety of bacteria present in green spaces, which benefits

the immune system and reduces inflammation," says Caoimhe. Soil and plants host trillions of micro-organisms that have a positive influence on your gut microbiome and general health.

IT MAKES YOU FIT FOR REAL LIFE

5 Setting up camp, hammering in tent pegs, carrying water, squatting to use a tree stump as a seat: camping involves lots of great exercise. And it's the functional kind – real-life activities involving bending, stretching, pushing, pulling and twisting that are great for agility, balance, strength and co-ordination, all especially important as we age.

IT PERKS UP THE BRAIN

6 "Being outside and having outdoor adventures unsticks our thinking," says Belinda Kirk of Explorers Connect. Getting away from your routine, improvising and making unfamiliar choices helps you perform better at work or school when you get back to normal life. "The natural world is boundless. There's something about being outside that sparks inspiration and the imagination," says Belinda. "You

start to approach things in a more open way."

CHILDREN ENJOY FREEDOM ...

7 "We need to allow our children to make mistakes. Helicopter parenting means kids don't get the chance to assess risks for themselves, so they grow up missing out on acquiring important skills," says Belinda. Camping is ripe with opportunities to redress the balance. Kids with autonomy outdoors grow up more active and more sociable, a study conducted by University College London found. If you're looking for a kickstart, why not take part in Wild Night Out on 29 June?

IT'S ABOUT BEING NOT BUYING

8 Getting back to basics helps you realise what "stuff" you actually need – and that includes camping gear. You can still benefit from things which have a measurable effect on wellbeing – such as a night sky full of stars or hearing the dawn chorus while snuggled inside your sleeping bag – using second-hand or borrowed kit. We also get more out of looking forward to great experiences than, say, the delivery of online purchases.



