

WELL BALANCED

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The Great Outdoors Month

THE *Power* OF Nature: WHY IT MATTERS— INSIDE AND OUT



Spending time in nature may be one of the simplest—and most overlooked—ways to support your health. Between technology, work expectations, and urban living, many people spend most of their time indoors and in front of a screen. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), nine in ten adults are online every day, and 41% report using the internet almost constantly.

As time spent indoors has increased, time in nature has decreased, along with many of the health benefits it provides. The American Heart Association (AHA) and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada both report that as little as two hours per week spent in nature can lead to better health.

Why Nature Works

The biophilia hypothesis offers one explanation for why time in nature is so impactful—It suggests that humans are naturally wired to connect with the natural world, shaped by evolution in environments where survival depended on it. In simple terms, our brains and bodies are wired to feel better when we're outside. Even small or brief exposure to nature can benefit overall health. According to the APA, just 40 seconds of looking at greenery can make a measurable difference. And time in nature doesn't have to happen all at once—it can be spread throughout the week.



Did You Know?

Natural light has a direct link to mood. Spending more time in natural light is known to have a positive impact on overall emotional well-being, according to Mental Health America.

Health Benefits of Being in Nature

Green and blue spaces, such as parks, forests, rivers, and oceans, support physical activity, social interaction, and relaxation. Beyond that, nature supports our health in many ways, including improving air and water quality and helping regulate the climate. These benefits extend even further, influencing our mental, cognitive, and physical health in powerful ways.

- Mental health benefits:
 - Improves mood
 - Promotes a calming effect, helping reduce stress and mental strain
 - Reduces anxiety, with outdoor exercise offering greater benefits than indoor workouts
 - Helps decrease negative thought patterns
 - Increases feelings of connection, creativity, and perspective.
- Cognitive health benefits:
 - Enhances attention, focus, and working memory
 - Improves cognitive flexibility, supporting adaptability, creative thinking, and the ability to shift focus
 - Restores mental energy and reduces cognitive fatigue
 - Boosts performance, even with brief exposure.
- Physical health benefits:
 - Increases the likelihood of engaging in regular movement and exercise
 - Supports vitamin D production through sun exposure, which is essential for bone health, immune function, and mood
 - Helps regulate the sleep cycle by increasing natural light exposure, leading to better sleep
 - Strengthens immune function.

Alternative Ways to Experience Nature

Although time spent outdoors in natural environments has the most significant impact on overall health, it may not always be feasible due to weather, location, or safety constraints, for example. Encouragingly, any amount or type of exposure can still provide benefits. Nature sounds, such as birds or ocean waves, have been shown to improve cognitive performance. Similarly, images, videos, or virtual reality experiences of nature can reduce stress and improve mood. Even viewing pictures of trees and plants can lower stress, blood pressure, heart rate, and muscle tension, according to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.

Tips to Bring More Nature into Each Day

If you're looking to experience nature more throughout your day, consider the following.

- Enjoy outdoor walks by adding one to your morning routine, taking one during a break, or ending your day with one.
- Eat meals outdoors or in spaces with natural elements.
- Visit parks or areas with green and blue spaces.
- Add natural elements indoors, such as plants, natural light, or nature-inspired imagery.



Did You Know?

Spending time in nature can influence how connected you feel. More time spent in nature increases connection to self, community, and purpose.

Sources

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