

10 Reasons Why Being Outside is Important



In today's world of powerful technology, many people feel the urge to simplify and get back to nature. To experience the health benefits of outdoor recreation, it's necessary to unplug and recharge in the wilderness. Those who are able to soak up everything nature has to offer find out why being outside is important—it comes down to health.

Long before smartphones and self-driving cars, Japan deemed "forest bathing" an essential part of its national health program. With forest bathing, the soaking isn't literal.

Bathing takes on a new meaning—immersing yourself in the natural environment.

The concept stems from Japanese Shinrin-Yoku Forest Therapy, and goes back to 1982. Over three decades later, the goal of forest bathing is still to reintroduce people to the healing power of nature. Much study and research has confirmed what the Japanese have long believed—nature benefits wellbeing in many ways.

The popularity of forest bathing has risen in the United States, particularly in metropolitan areas. Individuals, families, and friends have taken to the woods together for therapeutic hikes and nature walks. But forest bathing isn't the only thing you can use the outdoors to improve your wellbeing.

There are so many ways you can take advantage of the benefits of nature. We'll leave the how to you—hint: it starts with putting down your phone and experiencing the outdoors. We'll supply the why. Here are 10 reasons why being outside is important to improving the health of you and your family.

1. Relieve Stress

Getting outside can help you escape the stress of work or school. Stress can tear up a healthy mind and immune system. High levels of stress at work and school are associated with depression, obesity, and high blood pressure. Stress is

unhealthy when not managed properly. Luckily, there is a natural stress reliever right in your backyard.

Spending time in nature relieves stress in teens and adults. Bloodstream levels of the stress hormone cortisol are lowered after time spent outside. For a group of male students in China, those who spent their break from school hiking and camping returned with lower cortisol levels than those who spent time in the city. And these lower cortisol levels persisted for several days after their retreat to the wilderness.

The results suggest regular trips outdoors are a reliable way to manage stress. Experiences in nature are low cost and accessible to everyone. For the next long weekend, choose to spend time in nature over a trip to the city. You will reduce your stress load and return feeling rejuvenated.

Pro tip: Nature can help create more job satisfaction. Office workers with window views are more satisfied and less stressed at work. If you don't have a window, take time every day to look outside and feel the stress-busting effects of nature views.

2. Strengthen Immunity

Staying indoors can have a negative impact on your immune health. [The immune system works](#) best when challenged regularly. That doesn't happen when we spend time indoors.

Healthy doses of nature will help prepare your body fight. Here's how it works.

A study published in 2010 evaluated the effect of forest bathing on immune function. For a group of Japanese adults, a three-day trip to the forest increased the number of white blood cells in their blood. These levels of white blood cells stayed elevated for more than 30 days after their adventure in the woods. White blood cells are crucial to your immune system. They help your body battle germs by recognizing pathogens and harmful intruders with the help of antibodies.

The boost in immunity from a trip into nature can help keep you feeling healthy. [For active adults and growing children, increased immunity is a valuable asset in a healthy lifestyle.](#) Strengthening your body's natural germ-fighting power with a regular trip into the wild.

3. Sharpen Your Focus

In the general population, studies have shown that attention is almost uniformly enhanced by exposure to natural environments. A study published in 2009 found that the same holds true for children with attention deficits. Spending twenty minutes walking in a nearby park was sufficient enough to elevate attention performance in children with ADHD. This so-called "dose of nature" could prove to be a more natural solution to attention deficits in children.

The same effects can be seen in adult attention. Views of nature from an office window and breaks from work in the outdoors have both been shown to increase productivity and concentration.

For a significant boost in focus and creativity, escape to the woods for longer periods of time. Creative problem solving and cognitive function can be boosted by nearly 50 percent after spending several days exploring the outdoors.

Wilderness retreats may help you tackle a big assignment or personal goal. If you're still wondering why being outside is important, it can enhance your creativity.

4. Helps Develop a Healthier Diet

Looking for a hobby to get you outside? Gardening is a great way to increase your time outdoors. Not only does gardening keep you active, it provides you with access to healthy fruits and vegetables on a regular basis.

Outdoor recreation has long been associated with a healthy lifestyle. But being active in your garden also lets you can reap the healthy dietary rewards of your labor and get exercise at the same time.

[Read more reasons why you can grow health in the garden.](#)

5. Calm the Mind

Anxiety and depression can be crippling. Coping with mental illness is difficult and methods vary from person to person. Most physicians and therapists recommend regular exercise in addition to therapy and medication. Getting that recommended exercise outdoors can help ease emotional and mental pain while improving mood.

There are several physical responses our bodies have to being in nature. Sitting outside can reduce blood pressure, lower heart rate, and decrease cortisol levels. When we are outside our body slows down, helping us feel peaceful and calm.

Our minds work in a similar way. Spending time outside improves mood and reduces feelings of anxiety. We can focus better in nature, and our improved concentration can help us address feelings of stress and anxiety. Self-esteem can also receive a boost after time spent wandering outdoors.

Peace and mental clarity is a big reason why being outside is important. Find it by adding time in nature to your mental healthcare regimen.

6. Aids in Weight Management

Nature offers beautiful views and fresh air, so choose an exercise regimen that will get you outside. Research at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that more than one third of American adults are obese.

Exercise and proper diet are the two most effective ways to stop the spread of obesity. You can burn 149 calories each half hour of walking in the park, and 372 calories every half hour by riding your bike. To encourage kids to get exercise outside, find a fun activity to do as a family. [Increase your time walking, biking, running, and playing outside and lower your risk of obesity.](#) Take your exercise outside the gym and enjoy all the health benefits nature has to offer.

7. Better Your Short-Term Memory

Nature could be the answer to remembering names, not forgetting your keys, and taking better notes in class. There is growing evidence that both short-term and working memory can be improved by time spent outside.

At the University of Michigan, a simple experiment backed this theory. Two groups of students were given a memory test and then assigned to take a walk through a garden or down a city street. After their walks, the participants performed the memory test again. Those who walked through the garden improved their scores by 20 percent. No consistent improvement was observed in the participants who walked in the city.

Natural scenery and garden views calm our minds and help us focus. Urban settings are full of traffic, street noise, lights, and lots of people. These things pull our attention in several

directions. This makes it hard to sharpen our focus and recall things we just learned. Pondering new information in a peaceful, natural setting may help enhance [your short-term memory](#).

8. Improve Vision

Your eyes provide another reason why being outside is important. A study following Australian school children linked time spent outside and better vision. Of the 2,000 children followed during the study, those who spent more time playing outside significantly reduced their risk of becoming nearsighted. This suggests that outdoor activity has a protective effect on the eyes of children.

These results are striking because the same was not observed in children who spent time playing indoor sports. Being outside in fresh air and sunlight protects growing eyes more than equal physical activity indoors.

Dim indoor lighting makes it difficult for young eyes to focus on an image. This causes the eye to change shape in order to see clearly. The ample light of the outdoors keeps kid's eyes from working harder than they need to. So when encouraging play time and exercise, take the fun outside and protect your child's eye health.

9. Fight Nature Deficit Disorder

We're spending more time inside than ever before. Computers, tablets, cell phones, and video games hog our attention and keep us from getting into nature. That's especially bad for our children.

Playing outside encourages kid's creativity, builds their attention spans, and increases their desire to explore. The book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv outlines this growing pattern. Louv coined the term nature-deficit disorder to explain what happens when kids spend too much time indoors.

Recent findings show children ages 8-18 spend more than six hours each day with electronic media. A study published in 2002 found that 8-year-old children could better identify Pokémon characters than plants or animals in their neighborhoods. As children spend less time outside, unhealthy habits begin to form.

Children who spend little time outside are at risk for developing chronic health problems. Diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and depression are common companions of a sedentary indoor lifestyle. Help your family learn healthy habits and encourage playing outside over electronic devices.

10. Increase Longevity

A 2015 study followed 108,630 American women to determine the relationship between nature and longevity. Women who lived near parks, lawns, trees, and forests had significantly lower mortality than women living far from nature. The results held regardless of urban or rural settings.

The longer life expectancy associated with living near vegetation could be caused by several factors. Air quality is known to increase longevity and is better in areas of more dense vegetation. Being close to parks and nature trails can encourage more frequent exercise, which helps maintain heart health. Time spent outside also increases social engagement and can improve mental health.

Whatever the exact cause, getting outdoors will help you live happier and longer—and that's the ultimate reason why being outside is important. So, when establishing a place to live, pick a location where you and your family have regular access to nature.

Get Healthy, Get Outdoors

Find time today to venture outside and take advantage of the health benefits of the outdoors. Replace time spent inside on electronic devices with a bike ride or a walk to a local park. Take up forest bathing or gardening as a new hobby. And remember outdoor recreation can be enjoyed alone or as a family.

There's no wrong way to get outside and so much to be gained by exploring the natural world. You know why being outside is important. It's time to reconnect with nature. Your body and mind will thank you for it later.

About the Author

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