

Being Outside in Nature is Essential for Our Health and Wellbeing

I grew up in Toronto, Canada back in the 1970s. My grandfather was a geologist and an arctic explorer who appreciated the value of immersing oneself in the wild beauty of nature. Wanting to “toughen up” my sister and I, he signed us up at age 12 and 11 to spend a month in Northern Ontario at a wilderness canoe camp. We spent 17 days outdoors on canoe trips, often not seeing another group of humans –traversing our canoes down rivers, on lakes, portaging over waterfalls, cooking our meals on self-built campfires and “roughing it” together. Meandering down the rivers and forested trails as the sunlight beamed moving patterns on our paths are some of my favorite memories of summers in Temagami, Ontario. The life lessons I learned with gratitude from my wise grandfather are many, especially the positive energy gained from being outdoors and my important relationship with nature. (I definitely need a daily dose to feel “normal”). He would be thrilled that I am raising my daughters here in Oregon with the abundance of outdoor activities and natural beauty available here.

Our society and social norms are different now, however, and do not immediately promote health and wellbeing. We live in a fast-paced, overly electronically connected and distracted world, which often means spending minimal time in the outdoors. We spend excessive time inside as we get into our cars, commute to work, sit (and often) eat lunch in a hurried manner at our desks, get back into the car frustrated with traffic and ultimately present to our families completely emotionally exhausted. Cell phones constantly interrupt our streams of thought and distract us from what matters: being present to loved ones around us and the state of the world we live in.

We can change this unhealthy, excessively indoor culture. Let’s unplug, simplify and bring back the mojo that the outdoors gives all of us to enhance our vitality. We actually NEED to get outdoors and recharge every day. Consider outdoor walking meetings, weekend hikes, commuting to work by foot or bike when possible, or taking a 15-minute walk at lunchtime to revitalize your afternoons. Carving out time to spend outdoors has huge benefits, is readily available and is totally FREE! You can incorporate mindfulness into your walks for an additional benefit for your personal wellbeing.

Numerous studies have shown that spending time in nature, green spaces, and, specifically, forests makes us healthier by reducing stress, enhancing our focus, improving our mood and energy and enhancing quality sleep. Research is also showing that it boosts our immune system, lowers blood pressure, accelerates healing and may even help prevent some cancers.

Studies in Japan, where "shinrin-yoku" or "forest-bathing" is treated as preventive medicine, have also found that [areas with greater forest coverage have lower mortality rates](#) from a wide variety of cancers.

Being outdoors in nature is essential to our health and wellbeing. We need to immerse ourselves in the sights, sounds and smells and get back in touch with nature. Why not

start today? Find a green space that is convenient for you to access near you at home or your workplace to explore and make it part of your daily routine.

— Suzanne Deschamps, MD, Family Medicine Physician and Co-Director, NWP Physician Wellness