



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

MOTHER NATURE KNOWS BEST – THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING GREEN EXERCISE

Remember when your mother used to say, “go outside and play in the fresh air. It will do you some good!” She was right. Many of modern society’s most urgent physical health challenges, including obesity and coronary heart disease, are connected to sedentary and indoor lifestyles. Research now confirms that exercise performed in conjunction with exposure to nature, known as green exercise, has been associated with a variety of psychological and physiological benefits. Evidence indicates that exercising in a natural environment improves mood, and attention span, lowers heart rate and blood pressure, and relieves stress. Not only does green exercise have a therapeutic effect, helping us to recover from pre-existing stresses or problems, it can have an immunizing effect, protecting us from future stresses and the diseases caused by stress – particularly from cardiovascular disease.

THE THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS OF GREEN EXERCISE:

- Relieve stress
- Improve your mood
- Help recover from injury or burnout
- Have an immunizing effect against diseases
- Prevent cardiovascular disease
- Reduce blood pressure
- Improve stamina
- Prevent obesity
- Treat depression



5 MINUTES OF GREEN EXERCISE CAN HAVE AN IMPACT

Exercising outdoors does not mean you have to scale Mount Everest, dive in the Mariana Trench or hike in the Arctic. Even fairly stationary activities such as gardening or walking along a nature trail are beneficial. Nor does it have to be sustained for lengthy workouts. Research has shown that the first five minutes of green exercise appears to have the biggest impact on mood and self-esteem, suggesting an immediate psychological health benefit.

PEOPLE WHO EXERCISE OUTSIDE TEND TO EXERCISE LONGER

That said, people who exercise outdoors tend to exercise longer than they would indoors, because of lower levels of perceived exertion. When you are distracted by the beauty around you or by the social aspect of outdoor exercise, it seems easier, so you end up exercising longer, with greater intensity. In one study, when participants were asked to reproduce a given level of perceived exertion indoors and outdoors, they tended to walk faster at a greater physiological effort (verified by heart rate and blood lactate), when they were outdoors, suggesting they perceive exercise to be less demanding when performed in the natural environment. One European study reported that individuals living in a greener environment were three times more likely to be physically active, with a 40% lower chance of being overweight or obese. In fact, some studies show that even looking at pictures of pleasant outdoor settings while exercising can have a more positive effect than exercising indoors. And the more pleasant the environment, the greater the physiological effect – including a greater drop in blood pressure, an important measure of cardiovascular health.

This works for kids too. Children who spend even small amounts of time in green spaces tend to undertake higher intensity activity. If you want to get your kids to go to sleep early, send them outdoors to play!

EXPERIENCE THE RESTORATIVE EFFECT OF GREEN EXERCISE

Green exercise also has a restorative effect, which has important health implications. Chronic psychological stress and stress-related burnout have an extremely negative effect on cardiovascular, neurological and mental health. The number-one strategy for overcoming burnout is restoration – giving yourself time to recover from mental fatigue at the end of the day or on weekends. Exercising outdoors is the ideal place to seek this distraction and to ensure that you are leaving work behind. In England during the 19th century Industrial Revolution, wealthy philanthropists developed urban parks for the benefit of workers' health, and hospital gardens were considered important for their healing properties. Modern research likewise indicates a role for green exercise in rehabilitation programs. It is particularly useful for treating depression, alone or in conjunction with pharmacological therapies, particularly as an alternative to coping mechanisms like smoking, over-eating or alcohol consumption.

GREEN EXERCISE IS IMPORTANT FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

Green exercise has also been shown to improve quality of life in aging populations. Physically active people have a lower risk of dying from coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, hypertension and colon cancer. Activity also enhances mental health, fosters healthy muscles and bones, and helps maintain health and independence in older adults.

So listen to Mother Natures call and get some Green Exercise!

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