

HEALTH BENEFITS OF NATURE

ECOTHERAPY

Many governments and health care practitioners recognize the health benefits of protecting natural spaces and increasing access to them. Some doctors give prescriptions to their patients to get out in nature, this is called ecotherapy. It turns out that conserving natural spaces is just what the doctor ordered!



GOOD FOR THE MIND

Spending time in nature can improve mental health for diagnosed conditions or common daily stress.

- Interactions with nature can lower blood pressure, reduce depression and feelings of fear, anger or aggression.
- In both children and adults, contact with nature can reduce ADD symptoms. Spending time in green spaces allows people to think more clearly.
- In neighborhoods with 10% less tree cover, people are more likely to report signs of depression, anxiety, and stress.

NATURE PROTECTS

Nature protects drinking water, filtering pollutants, purifying the air, and moderating our climate.

Natural spaces can decrease the average temperatures in urban spaces, thereby protecting individuals from illness and stress induced by hot weather.

Certain bacteria, more common in green environments, can suppress allergic responses to common irritants such as pollen and animals.

The soil bacteria *Mycobacterium vaccae*, is also a natural antidepressant.

Fewer protected natural areas can increase the incidence of disease around the world. Forest fragmentation reduces the diversity of vertebrates, which increases the ability of vector-borne diseases (e.g., West Nile virus) to spread.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF NATURE

- Childrens cognitive development can be improved through regular, direct contact with nature.
- People experiencing dementia can decrease aggressive behavior by spending time in nature.
- Forest walks decrease blood pressure, heart rate, sympathetic nerve activity and the stress hormone cortisol.
- Living near green space can lower stress levels.

GOOD FOR THE BODY

- Children who live in neighborhoods with more green space have lower Body Mass Indexes (indicating a healthier weight and activity level)
- Patients recover faster and require less medicine when they can view green spaces from their hospital rooms.
- The likelihood that individuals are physically active can be three times greater in neighborhoods with more green space.
- Time in nature can even reduce nearsightedness in children.
- Elderly people are more likely to get the recommended 2.5 hours of weekly walking when they have access to green space.
- Tree loss in communities correlates with increased mortality from cardiovascular and lower respiratory diseases.
- Mothers who live in greener neighborhoods deliver bigger babies, and are much more likely carry a baby to term than those who live in less green areas.

NATURE PROVIDES

Children exposed to nature at a younger age develop better immune systems and have reduced rates of asthma. For every 350 trees per square km, asthma rates can drop by as much as 25% in young children.

When we lose nature, and the plant and animal diversity it houses, we lose opportunities to discover new medicines. Some of the medical treatments discovered in nature include Aspirin from willows, and Taxol (used in chemotherapy for a range of cancers) from the Pacific Yew Tree.

