

Take a Walk in Nature; “Forest Bathing”

One study conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan found that taking nature walks offers a host of mental health benefits, including decreased depression, improved well-being and mental health, and lower stress. Positive effects on mood seem to be especially strong among people who have recently experienced a traumatic life event, like a serious illness, death of a loved one or divorce.

Walking is an inexpensive, low risk and easy form of exercise. Combined with nature in a group setting, walking might be a powerful, under-utilized stress buster.

Taking a daily walk in nature also can lead to better cardiovascular health, reduced stress, improved mood and self-esteem, strengthened bones and healthy weight, as well as boosts in creative thinking.

Japan’s “Forest Bathing”

One trend that has reached America is the Japanese concept of “forest bathing,” or *shinrin-yoku*, combining “forest” and “bath.” This is not an exercise like hiking or jogging. It refers to simply being in nature and connecting to it via our senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.

According to Dr. Qing Li, author of *Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness*, “Even a small amount of time in nature can have an impact on our health. A two-hour forest bath will help you to unplug from technology and slow down. It will bring you into the present moment and de-stress and relax you. Numerous studies I’ve conducted have shown that *shinrin-yoku* has real health benefits,” he says.

Dr. Li recommends letting nature enter through your ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands and feet. Listen to birds singing and the breeze rustling in the leaves of the trees. Look at the different greens of the trees and the sunlight filtering through the branches. Smell the fragrance of the forest and breathe in the natural aromatherapy. Taste the freshness of the air as you take deep breaths ...