

Relaxing with Nature

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It is a common fact of life in our modern society that we are always on the go. Meetings, children in sports, family responsibilities, or work responsibilities seem to dominate our lives and give us plenty of stress. Technology is everywhere as just about everyone has a smartphone, tablet, computer, or some other electronic device that seems to grab our attention more than anything. Is there something that can be done to unplug and destress from this on the go lifestyle? Does it cost anything? The solution to unplugging and reducing your stress is quite simple actually: Get Outdoors!

Getting outdoors does more good for your mind and body than you would likely imagine. The sound of birds chirping, wind rustling the leaves, the chitter of a squirrel can be quite pleasing to hear and truly allow the mind to unwind from our mobile lifestyles. According to physician Jay Lee, getting outdoors and being physically active is a good thing to help keep limber while relieving chronic pain and stiffness. Going outdoors also means that we must unplug from many of our electronic devices which allows us to clear the mind to focus on ourselves and enjoying the surroundings so that we are not focused on what we may be doing with our electronics.

Sick of being stuck inside all winter? Enjoying a day outdoors in nature is a great way to break that cabin fever! As many of us know, being stuck inside all winter is a great way to pick up the flu or any other sickness. Fresh air is always to be found in the outdoors! Visiting a park, prairie garden, or maybe the Black Swamp Nature Center can aid in your mental wellbeing as well. According to Dr. Irina Wen, at New York University, spending time outdoors can help reduce cognitive fatigue and stress while also helping with depression and anxiety.

The beautiful scenes that are found in nature help to distract us from any stress and pain we might be experiencing, allowing us to place the focus on ourselves. An article by the University of Minnesota notes that humans are genetically programmed to place our attention on finding trees, plants, water, and other elements of nature, which allows for our minds to be focused on something else. It is a natural human behavior to find immense fascination with nature which allows us to place our focus on nature, allow our minds to take a break, and come back recharged and ready for new tasks.

While I am sure it already goes without saying, the benefits of getting outdoors are just simply countless. Many experts have described spending time in a forested area to achieve wellness rewards as “forest bathing”. The magazine Environmental Health & Preventive Medicine conducted a study in 2010 where they determined that those who went for a walk in the woods had lower blood pressure and low levels of cortisol, a hormone associated with stress, compared to those who walked down a busy city sidewalk. The calm and serene environment of a leisurely stroll through the woods backs this data up very well.

Natural sunlight also provides prime exposure to much needed vitamin D. Vitamin D that can be obtained from spending some time outdoors helps the body increase its absorption of calcium which helps when it comes to bone and dental health. It also this vitamin that allows your blood pressure to be lowered as it improves the flow of blood by relaxing your blood vessels, according to MentalFloss. Have trouble sleeping? Natural sunlight can also help when it comes to feeling rested by controlling the production of melatonin. According to MentalFloss, this hormone controls the body's internal clock and is affected by light in that melatonin production is halted during the day.

How do you prepare for a journey outdoors? Always make sure you have the right footwear ready. With the amount of walking to be undertaken, be sure to wear comfortable shoes or boots that will make the most of your walking adventure. Be sure to also take plenty of water with you so that you can stay hydrated during your journey. Lastly, be sure to dress for the weather and be sure to put on the sunscreen!

Where can you get outdoors? The Black Swamp Nature Center (BSNC) consists of 51 acres in total with 24 acres of woodland, 14 acres of wetlands, and 6 acres of meadow. Avid fishermen certainly enjoy the boat launch located in the BSNC which allows easy access to Flat Rock Creek while walkers and joggers find enjoyment from walking trails circling around the banks of the former beet factory ponds. Each trail offers a nice and relaxing trek through nature where you will see many beautiful plants along with many species of wildlife enjoying the area just as much as you are. The BSNC is perfectly safe for all to enjoy and is perfect for your own personal enjoyment or for the enjoyment of your nature group.

Be sure to encourage your wellness group to also come out and enjoy the trails with a relaxing walk. Maps of the BSNC are available in the Paulding SWCD Office or on our website www.pauldingswcd.org under "Black Swamp Nature Center". Get outdoors and enjoy nature, there is so much to explore!