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Nature's Bounty: Free Therapy

Jasmin Tahmaseb-McConatha

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, jtahmasebmconatha@wcupa.edu

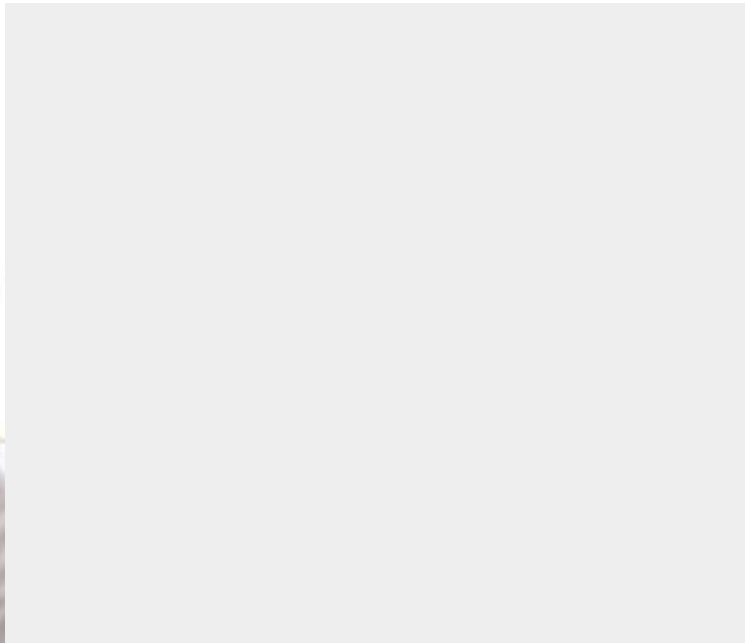
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Natures Bounty: Free Therapy

The Healing Power of Time Spent in Nature

Posted Jun 10, 2014



Source:

Nature deprivation has a negative impact on the health and [happiness](#) of people of all ages. It is well known that an alienation from nature partially corresponds to an increase in [stress](#) related illnesses, [depression](#), and [anxiety](#). This spring I experienced a strong dose of nature deprivation. Recovering from surgery made it difficult for me to find time to appreciate the nourishing beauty of nature. Thankfully, I recovered, the semester ended, and I was able to take a long awaited bicycling trip to Belgium and Holland. Although I believe I was the least fit person in the group of 16 cyclists, I managed to make it through a daily routine of 40 to 60 kilometers of biking. Despite the healing powers of this physical activity, more existential nourishment came from spending hours in the countryside as we biked through European forests and fields. After one week, the stresses of long winter days gradually receded, and began to feel a sense of rejuvenation and renewal. Although I am very [grateful](#) to have had the time and the opportunity to recharge my batteries in this way, we do not need to go on a biking trip in Europe to experience existential renewal. A daily walk in a local park or an afternoon at a beach contemplating the waves can also provide much appreciated renewal. Nature offers free [therapy](#).

Being in nature also provides physiological rewards. Time spent outside not only sharpens [attention](#) and [memory](#), it also increases levels of vitamin D, which the body produces when it is exposed to sunlight. Indeed, Vitamin D deficiency is widespread among older adults. Vitamin D is necessary for the maintenance of strong bones. It also helps the body process necessary calcium. Given the concerns of osteoporosis and bone damage in later life, a vitamin D deficiency can prove to be a serious health threat. Vitamin D deficiency is also another risk factor associated with increased cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment, as well as asthma.

In order to be happy and thrive, we are wired to interact with air, water, plants, and other animals. We need a connection to nature. Alienation from nature is as devastating to our health as is alienation from social relationships. In England, a 2007 study found that a daily dose of walking outside could be as effective as taking [antidepressant](#) drugs for treating mild to moderate depression. A report from the BBC (April 21, 2013) addressed the importance of parks, gardens, and green spaces in the promotion of health and happiness. The notion that fresh air and beautiful natural settings promote health is not new. Healing gardens have long existed in many cultures. The Persian garden, for example, has always been considered a magical place, a place for socializing, relaxation, [spirituality](#), and prayer--a paradise on earth. The beautiful garden in the ancient city of Isfahan is one example of such a paradise. It is a peaceful place thousands of people visit each year.

In fact the word “paradise” is derived from the old Persian word that signifies an enclosed garden. Christians adopted this term and applied it to the Garden of Eden.

Persian carpets are representations of a Persian garden, replete with walls, fountains, and flowering shrubs on the perimeter. The fountains in the carpet's center are important metaphors for calmness and self-reflection. In this way the garden is perceived as a place of spiritual reflection.

Time spent in nature is therapy without side effects. Taking a walk, a bike ride, a hike, or a boat ride, will reduce stress and promote wellbeing and [optimism](#) about life. Even 30 minutes a day can lead to important improvements. Take advantage of this free therapy. Take a few minutes and contemplate the beauty of nature; walk, bike, hike, swim, or just sit under a tree.