

Get Outside to Improve Your Mental and Physical Health

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A typical person in today's industrial society spends the vast majority of his or her time indoors and in front of some sort of screen. From the time they wake up until the time they go to bed, the only moments that they are outdoors is while they walk from their cars to their offices and vice versa. Children who are somewhat active might be outdoors more often, but much of that time is dedicated to organized sports activities on a manicured lawn.

Very rarely do any of us, neither children or adults, spend quality time in the natural world of forests, rivers, marshes, and the like. Our need to control the natural settings of the world around us has led us into avoiding contact with the natural world that doesn't have concrete sidewalks and close cut lawns.

In this article, originally written by the outdoor blog LiveOnceLiveWild.com, we dive deep into this topic and explore the price of not engaging with the outdoors.

The Price That Comes with Lack of Contact with the Natural World

Because of the insulated environments that define our everyday life, most of us have absolutely no idea how the natural world sustains us. We may think that water comes from a tap while never having seen the river or spring that feeds the municipal water system. From our consumer mindset, food comes from the shelves of the local grocery store instead of from the complex and intricate relationships of soil organisms that give fertility to our crops.

The lack of contact with the natural world has caused us to forget how our lives are ultimately dependent on the ultimate world. The enclosure of our lives in the world of screens, shopping malls, and infinite comforts and luxuries has also indirectly led to some of the global crises we collectively face. When you don't come into contact with the natural world, there is very little incentive to protect it.

Physical Health Benefits that Come with Being Outside

Lack of contact with the natural world has also led to a number of serious physical health problems. Obesity, heart disease, diabetes and dozens of other problems are tied to the sedentary, screen-filled lives that define our everyday living. While signing up for a membership at your local gym will certainly help you get the exercise you need, the treadmill simply doesn't compare to a walk through the woods.

Getting outside into the natural world brings a number of important physical health benefits. For starters, Vitamin D is notoriously missing in the majority of foods that we eat. We should be getting between 80 and 90% percent of the Vitamin D that we need from the sunshine. That, however, requires us to be outside during a part of the day. Your morning walk through the woods doesn't only give you needed exercise, but it will also get you the vitamin D you need for bone growth, cell growth, inflammation reduction and neuromuscular and immune function.

Furthermore, being outside actually makes exercise easier and more enjoyable. Everyone knows that we need to exercise, however, those early morning visits to the gym can seem like drudgery. One recent study found that being surrounded by the color green actually makes exercise easier as it lessens the sensation of exertion.

Mental Health Benefits that Come with Being Outside

The health benefits of spending time outdoors aren't just reduced to physical benefits. Rather, there are a number of important mental health benefits of spending time outside. Spending time outdoors helps to increase your brain function and makes it easier to concentrate. It also increases your creativity production, which is essential for young, school-age children.

In our stress-filled society, it can be hard to find a balance between work and rest. Most of us live between deadlines, and the effects of stress on our physical and mental well-being are easily seen in the increasing amount of people suffering from anxiety and panic disorders. Spending time outdoors has been proven to lower stress levels and even lower your heart rate.

Finally, there is something inherent in the human being that responds with happiness to things that are ultimately good for us. Spending time in the natural world is obviously healthy, both physically and mentally. When we take time out of our busy lives to enjoy the natural world, a feeling of deeper and more meaningful happiness becomes a reality.

Get Outside for Happier, Healthier Life

We need to find ways to escape from the bondage of screens, walls and carefully controlled environments in order to take advantage of the physical health and mental health benefits that come with being outside. Even a short walk every morning through the woods will prepare you mentally and physically for a healthier lifestyle.