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8 Amazing Ways Nature Can Heal You

Mother nature can help lower your heart rate, boost your immunity, make you sleep better, and much more. (Ain't she magical?)

by FLORENCE WILLIAMS (/AUTHOR/FLORENCE-WILLIAMS) FEBRUARY 14, 2017



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Consider this: One in four U.S. women has a medical prescription to treat depression or anxiety. College campuses are reporting a spike in students needing psychiatric counseling. And between 1994 and 2008, the rate of antidepressant use in the U.S. jumped nearly 400 percent.

Many of us juggle jobs and families and

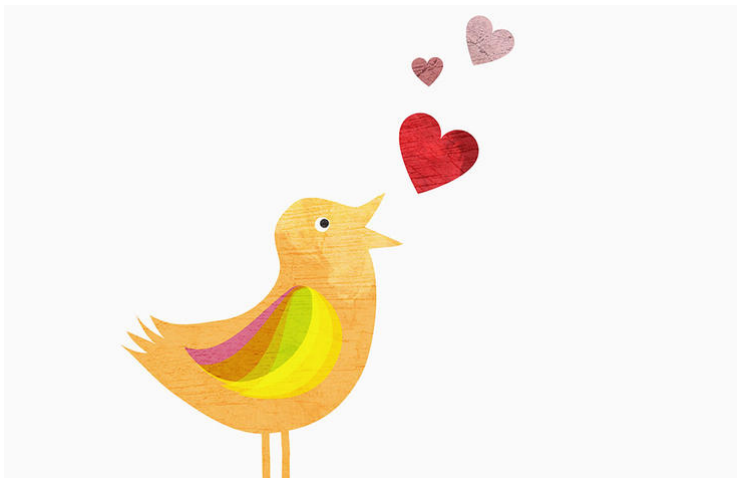


information overload, often lacking the social support to keep all of our plates spinning. And because of indoor work and school and smartphones, we're experiencing a colossal dislocation unique in human history: a physical and emotional separation from the natural world.

These two trends reinforce each other. Humans harbor a deeply evolved connection with nature, and researchers are discovering tangible benefits to reconnecting with green, growing spaces. Nature occupies center stage in promoting our wellbeing. Here are eight ways spending time outdoors can fix what ails you.

(See how easy it is to grow your own remedies for joint pain, heartburn, cold symptoms, and 30+ other ailments with Rodale's [Grow It Heal It!](http://www.growitheal.it) (http://www.growitheal.it/resp/index?keycode=259625&utm_source=Rodalesorganiclife.com&utm_medium=Web&utm_campaign=textlink))





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Lower Your Heart Rate

The world is getting irritatingly louder, from road traffic to overhead jets. The antidote? Nature sounds. Throughout our evolution, birdsong reminded us that, literally, no storms were brewing. Penn State University professor Josh Smyth, who studies the calming effects of nature sounds on our heart rates and hormones, recommends immersion in natural soundscapes for 20 minutes a day. When you can't get outside, try an app or a recording of sounds like birdsongs, wind, or waves.



2/8

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Boost Your Immunity

Like our ears, our noses form a pathway to our primal, emotional brains. Researchers in Japan have found that the sharp, invigorating compound pinene—released by evergreen trees—significantly lowered the heart rates of babies, while a mist of essential oil from the hinoki cypress tree pumped up the activity of natural killer cells, a type of immune cell, in adults. While walking, crumble pine needles and take a whiff.

Related: [Garden-Grown Immunity](http://www.rodaleorganiclife.com/wellbeing/garden-grown-immunity)

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Inspire Greater Compassion

Awe was proven in recent experiments to trigger feelings of compassion, generosity, and connection. When we feel bighearted, our personal woes seem smaller. Nature inspires awe in doses both large and small, says Paul Piff, a psychologist at the University of California,

Irvine. He found that subjects who gazed at a stand of tall trees for just 1 minute expressed more generosity afterward. Get a burst of awe by looking up at forest tops, brawny mountains, or a watery moon.



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IMAGE SOURCE/GETTY

Foster More Friendships

Social connection is known to improve symptoms of depression and inspire us to exercise more. And nature fosters easy connection, as every camp counselor knows. A Dutch study of 10,000-plus people showed that those living near green space felt less lonely. Other studies suggest that immersion in natural settings is linked to social bonding and stronger neighborly ties. Meet friends for walks in the park to double down on chatting and dog walking.

Related: [10 Ways Nature Can Help You Become a Better Person](http://www.rodaleorganiclife.com/wellbeing/become-a-better-person)

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Increase Your Brainpower

Kids may need nature more than anybody. There's a reason schools in Finland kick kids outdoors for breaks several times a day. Without exploratory play, children may miss the opportunity to lay down critical neural pathways and develop gross motor skills. Studies show that even small bursts of time in nature can boost attention spans, test scores, and exercise levels, especially among girls. Throw open the door and see how fast your kids stop arguing and start building forts and climbing trees.





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Improve Your State Of Mind

“Out in the morning!” exhorted Walt Whitman. Solo time in nature is shown to be helpful not just for creativity, but also for mental health. When Stanford University psychologist Greg Bratman assigned volunteers to take a 90-minute walk either in a park or on a city street, only the park walkers reported a decrease in repetitive, depressive thoughts, while also showing decreased activation in a part of the brain associated with morose thinking. When you need to solve a problem, head outside for a walk.



Encourage Deeper Sleep

Take short breaks from desk chairs and indoor air pollutants to read or work outside. Besides the cognitive boost of being outdoors, natural, full-spectrum light helps reset our diurnal rhythm, which has been shown to improve sleep and counter depression. The vitamin D we get from the sun has also been associated with a reduced risk of certain types of cancer.



8/8

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See The Bigger Picture

There's nothing like throwing off the urban mantle for a few days to find new insights into our lives. David Strayer, a neuroscientist at the University of Utah, is documenting what he calls "the three-day effect," in which nature helps you tap into certain parts of your brain, including what's known as the default network, a zone that's been studied in Buddhist monks. It's what kicks in when your multitasking centers power down. Aim for three consecutive days in a natural setting—think wilderness area or quiet

seaside—at least once a year.

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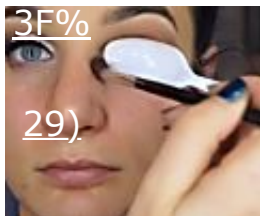
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6 Small Skin Problems That Can Signal A Major Problem

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