

ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN



AUGUST 2019

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: GREEN EXERCISE



Now that summer is here, there is no better way to improve your fitness than to exercise in the great outdoors. Whether you are trail running, hiking, kayaking, or mountain biking, just getting outside and interacting with nature will leave you feeling refreshed, re-energized, and focused. Connecting with nature is vital to our overall health and well-being. Green exercise refers to any physical activity that takes places in nature.

What are the benefits of green exercise?

To start, outdoor exercise promotes stress reduction and improved mindset. Studies have shown that it contributes to decreased tension, confusion, and anger. Even just looking at green space can

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➔ Continued from page 1

decrease the stress-related hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Exposure to natural sunlight combined with physical activity is thought to increase serotonin levels in our bodies, which can improve feelings of well-being and happiness. Scientists reported that just five minutes of green exercise resulted in improvements in self-esteem and mood. In addition, studies reveal that those who incorporate outdoor exercise into their fitness regimens have better commitment to their exercise programs.

Spending time outdoors can lower stress levels, decrease blood pressure, and reduce the risk of asthma, allergies, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, while boosting mental health and increasing life expectancy. Doctors recommend spending 120 minutes each week outside.

Green exercise mixes it up

Outdoor sports and activities incorporate different muscle groups than structured indoor workouts. For example, trail running and hiking are more difficult than exercising on a treadmill. The uneven terrain requires more lateral movements and activates stabilizer muscles throughout our ankles, knees, and core.

Outdoor training and indoor exercise are both important to overall health and wellness. The key is to find a balance between the two and maximize the benefits that both have to offer. After all, there is no better feeling than seeing the positive impact indoor training has on your ability to perform your favorite outdoor activity.

Before you head out for green exercise

- **Protect yourself from the sun.** Although some sun is good for you, too much can be dangerous. Cover up exposed skin or wear sunscreen with a minimum SPF of 30.
- **Keep hydrated.** Hydrated muscles function better, so make sure to drink water before, during, and after exercise. If you are exercising strenuously in hot weather for longer than one



hour, you should drink a sports beverage that contains carbohydrates and electrolytes.

- **Avoid extreme temperatures.** On hot days, exercise in the morning or in the evening when the temperatures are lower. This will help prevent heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- **Be safe.** Let people know where you are going and when you will return. It is always safer to exercise in groups.

Take advantage of the nice weather, and challenge yourself with a new activity. Perhaps it will be a new trail run or mountain bike route, or maybe you will attempt paddle boarding for the first time. Or just take a nature break, go for a short walk outside to feel rejuvenated and more focused for the remainder of your day.

SOURCES:

- Gladwell, V. F., Brown, D. K., Wood, C., Sandercock, G. R., & Barton, J. L. (2013). The great outdoors: how a green exercise environment can benefit all. *Extreme physiology & medicine*, 2(1), 3. doi:10.1186/2046-7648-2-3
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/13/health/nature-outdoors-health.html>

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