

The Restorative Powers of Nature

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~ By Kirsten Antony R.N., C.R. ~

As summer nears, most of us find ourselves wanting to spend time in the great outdoors. The sunshine, the beautiful flowers, and the cool breeze seem to beckon us to take a walk, work in the garden, or just sit and take in the summer enchantment. Did you know that just being out in nature has many healing effects?

Studies show that being out in nature can enhance well-being. Improvements in health range from decreased stress, improved memory, improved immune response, decreased depression and, sometimes, if you are lucky, an overwhelming sense of euphoria.

One place in particular that is famous for this feeling of euphoria is Niagara Falls. There seems to be a reason why so many people find themselves enraptured at this majestic place of beauty. There is a science behind why feelings joy and happiness occur at Niagara Falls. In places of nature such as forests, beaches, waterfalls and rivers, invisible molecules called negative ions are in abundance. These molecules have lost an electrical charge by being broken apart by sunlight, moving air or water. These molecules can be found in places of nature and can have sedative and pain-relieving effects.

Many of us do spend much of our time indoors. Unfortunately, the opposite of negative ions, positive ions, are found a plenty indoors and can be produced by things such as electronic devices, cigarette smoke, and air conditioning. However, you can increase the negative ions inside the home or office by adding plants, fresh flowers or water fountains. Bringing nature inside can help

counter the effects of the positive ions in the air.

There are several terms and ideas about nature and healing. Many countries including Japan, Finland and South Korea have programs called Forest Bathing. Forest Bathing consists of a system of nature trails throughout the countries where you simply walk or sit and engage your senses of the forest. Scientists have found that forest bathing can decrease depression and lower blood pressure. There is also a term called “biophilia”. The biophilia hypothesis suggests intense connection humans have with nature. It is said to be an instinctive evolutionary bond with the natural world. Ecotherapy is also a coined term correlating nature and healing.

Earthing or Grounding is basically the idea to walk barefoot in nature. The body draws electrons from the earth and balances the body. Studies have shown that walking barefoot in nature can improve sleep, increase antioxidants and reduce inflammation.

Even though going barefoot is not for everyone, this concept does include just sitting or sleeping out in nature. The idea is to get close to the ground to absorb the healing energy.

I believe John Muir sums it up the best, “In every walk in nature, one receives more than one sees”.



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