

Go on, Get outside!

With gyms and recreation facilities closed, getting active isn't the same as it was a few weeks ago. While spring is on our door step, it isn't quite here yet, and the weather or sloppy walk ways may detour you from taking your activity outdoors. But did you know it's actually good for you to spend time outdoors? As long as you maintain an appropriate distance from others, there has never been a more better time to getting outside!

What are the benefits to being outside?

Mood – This is one of the biggest benefits to getting outside. Exposure to outdoors and natural light are proven to help reduces stress, depression, feelings of anxiety, and negative thoughts. Also the scents of plants and nature is like natural aromatherapy encouraging calm and relaxation. While some stress is necessary, beneficial, and unavoidable, too much chronic stress can be detrimental to our health. Having coping mechanisms to reduce our stress levels is important to living a balance life. Time outdoors helps lower the stress hormone cortisol, and being in nature helps us cope with stress and anxiety in these unprecedented times.

Improved eye health – Myopia (near sightedness) increases with lack of sunlight. Too much computer or screen time also leads to headaches, blurred vision, and red eyes. Studies show spending time outdoors can help reduce these symptoms as well as the development of myopia. That is important to know with the increased screen we are likely experiencing these days.



Exercise– While most people are aware of the health benefits of exercise, that doesn't mean everyone does it or enjoys it. Especially now – even those with a well established fitness routine may feel lost and out of sync with a sudden new work and home life schedule. Going outside can make exercise more enjoyable than being stationary and inside. It is also easily accessible to get a workout at all fitness levels. If you are working from home or have kids at home right now, this is the perfect way to break up the day and get some movement in for everyone.

Boost energy– some studies suggest being outside for 20 minutes gives you the same boost as a cup of coffee. Sunshine, fresh air, and a cool breeze help invigorate the body. Regular exposure to sunlight also helps regulate our circadian rhythms and promotes better sleep quality. This is HUGE for people right now as we are spending so much time indoors, and specifically, at home.

Boost creativity – before and after tests on creativity showed backpackers had a much higher result after a 4 day hike. It can also help academic performance and boost focus. This may lead to better memory retention and some studies have shown increased performance on memory tests after walking in nature.

Longevity – Living near a park, lawn, trees or forest can add years to your life. Scientists are not sure why – it could be increased exercise frequency, or maybe better air quality. Some studies suggest those over 70 who spent time outside had higher mobility and reported less aches and pains, as well as showed less decline in their ability to perform daily tasks.

What's the best way to get outside?

Any way that you enjoy while still maintaining social distancing!

There are lots of ways to increase your time spent outside. If you are working mostly from a desk, you may enjoy having an outdoor walking lunch break. Even if you have a treadmill at home, enjoy your walk or run by the river. Just make sure to leave 2 meters between yourself and anyone you pass by. Need something more challenging? Find a big stair case and really get your heart pumping! Add in some lunges, squats, and push ups and make it a total body workout! Take the kids to a local park and have a game of soccer. Or maybe try an easy mountain hike. There are so many possibilities! Just remember to maintain space between yourself and others. This means if a parking lot looks busy, find another place to go. Or going at different hours to avoid crowds – like early mornings or before sunset. **Maintain a safe space, and enjoy all mother nature has to offer us!**

Boost immune system– Scientists think that breathing in phytoncides—airborne chemicals produced by plants—increases our levels of white blood cells, helping us fight off infections and diseases. Additionally, vitamin D is produced in the body when the skin is exposed to sunlight. Ideally 10–30 minutes around mid-day is enough to maintain healthy vitamin D levels (depending on skin color and tolerance to sunlight). Vitamin D helps strengthen our bones, improve our immune systems, and reduce inflammation. It is also showing to be very important in mental health.

The sun is finally reaching a position in the sky here in Alberta that is enabling us to synthesis Vitamin D again! While this doesn't mean you should reduce your daily supplement quite yet, it does mean your chances are way higher of reaching your daily needs are being met.