Nature and Mental Health

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“Stop and smell the roses” is a common phrase used to tell people to slow down and appreciate what is around them, but did you know the advice to get outside where the roses are, has some science behind it? According to the American Psychological Association, being outdoors has a variety of benefits for your brain health (Weir, 2020). If you find yourself struggling to focus, over stressed, and constantly in a bad mood, it could benefit you to get out and connect with nature. Summer is a great time for making this happen. Here’s three tips to help you incorporate nature into your everyday life and give yourself a brain boost on a regular basis.

1. **Set an alarm for a daily walk outside.** Whether it is just before lunch, just after lunch, halfway through the afternoon slump, or even in the morning before you leave for work or school, an alarm can be a simple reminder to take your outside walk.
2. **Short and sweet works like a charm.** Your walk doesn’t have to be long; researchers have shown that even small amounts of exposure to nature can have big benefits to your brain (Weir, 2020). One study found a correlations between children who had been exposed to more green space, noting that they were 55% less likely to develop a mental health issue later in life (Schertz & Berman, 2019). So, the more exposure to nature you receive the better chance you have at positive mental health.
3. **Bring nature inside.** You can do this with plants, green colors, paintings, photos, and more. In one study, researchers used images and videos of nature versus actually being outside and found that even exposure via videos and images made a huge difference as well (Schertz & Berman, 2019). So, you can include nature in life by having paintings, including natural elements, and more into your home and work space and receive mental benefits.
4. **Get natural light as often as you can.** This can be through opening windows or time outside. If you can’t get sunlight through these ways, there are natural lamps that mimic the sun. Research has shown again and again that sunlight can have positive effects on mental health (NHS, 2022). This is because sunlight creates more production of serotonin, which can improve levels of happiness and reduce stress (NHS, 2022).

As a bonus tip, try to have the right equipment to stay safe. As we’ve already discussed, being outside has great benefits to mental health, but can sometimes be hard to do when you are ill-equipped. For example, if you want to spend time outdoors in heat or sun, having lightweight clothing, lots of water, and sun block will make your time outside far more enjoyable. The same goes for spending time outside in cold weather, the better equipped you are, the more enjoyable spending time outdoors will be.

To summarize; being outside has amazing benefits such as reduced stress and improved mood. Doing things like getting outside, getting greenspace, and bringing the outdoors in can help you more than you know. So, the next time you feel like you could use a mood boost or reduce stress it really may be worth it to “stop and smell the roses”.

References:

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