



Enjoy the Many Benefits of Walking in Nature

By Kelli Richards

We are fortunate to live in beautiful tree-lined communities; many of us very close to parks and forests (some virtually within such an environment). One of the reasons I bought my house where I did was for the proximity of a natural preserve that I could enjoy walking through regularly. But how often do we get out for a walk and soak up the many benefits that nature provides for a full sensory, immersive experience?

During the 1980s, Japanese researchers discovered that leaving the stresses and anxieties of the modern civilized world behind even for an hour or so could be the best medicine and the healthiest thing you do for yourself all day, leaving you happier and more productive as a result.

The practice of *shinrin-yoku* (translated to mean ‘forest bathing’ or ‘forest therapy’) calls on us to leave phones and other devices behind, and give ourselves the gift of soaking up time in nature fully engaging all five senses. Studies have shown that there are calming, rejuvenating and restorative benefits to be achieved. The more stress we have in our daily lives, the more profound the benefits we stand to receive.

Dr. Qing Li is the world’s foremost expert in forest medicine. He’s a medical doctor in Tokyo, a founding member and chairman of the Japanese Society for Forest Medicine, a visiting fellow at Stanford, and author of the recently published book, *Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help*



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You Find Health and Happiness. Dr. Li shares, “A two hour forest bath will help you to unplug from technology and slow down; it will bring you into the present moment, de-stress and relax you. Even a small amount of time in nature can rejuvenate and boost your spirits.”

Physical benefits include: reduced blood pressure, improved mood, improved sleep, increased energy, accelerated recovery from illness, boosted immune system and, of course, reduced stress. Mental benefits include a deeper and clearer intuition, enhanced relationships, overall increase in happiness and a sense of calm, and stronger life force flow.

One of the biggest benefits may come from chemicals known as phytoncides, antimicrobials emitted by plants and trees. One study found that women who logged 2-4 hours in a forest or park on two consecutive days saw a nearly 40% increase in white blood cell count. Dr. Li says, “Phytoncide exposure reduces stress hormones, indirectly increasing the immune system’s ability to kill tumor cells.” If you can’t get outside for a walk during the day, even having plants in your home or office or having trees or a garden or nature setting outside your window helps to reduce tension, depression, blood pressure and anxiety and can have a soothing effect on your mind, body and spirit.

So, fill your prescription of vitamin N by getting close to nature as much as you can on a regular basis -- solo or with others -- and observe the profound effects it can have on you and your family, colleagues, friends and loved ones. It’s a terrific (and free!) way to enhance your well-being, reduce stress levels and boost your health, mood and much more.

Kelli Richards, founder and Managing Director of The All Access Group is the exclusive provider of business consulting, mentoring, and strategic connections editorial in Atherton Living and Los Altos Hills magazines. For more information, visit allaccessgroup.com.

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