



Embracing Nature for Better Wellbeing



Many of us have experienced the warm, comforting afterglow that follows time spent outdoors. The special sensation of a sun-kissed face, windswept hair, and the rewarding feeling of well-worked muscles.

But what is it about the great outdoors that makes us feel so...great?

It turns out that spending time in nature is a form of therapy in itself. Ecotherapy, or nature therapy as it is also known, is the practice of connecting with the natural world to improve our mental health and general wellbeing.

Ecotherapy stems from the belief that *“people are part of the web of life and that our psyches are not isolated or separate from our environment.”* By harmonising with the earth's intrinsic ecosystems, we can:

- Lift our mood
- Reduce feelings of stress and anxiety
- Slash loneliness and isolation
- Boost our fitness and physical health
- Enhance our cognitive function
- Feel more connected to the natural world around us

While it's no secret that spending time in nature makes us feel fantastic, it seems that science supports this practice, too. In a [2019 study](#) conducted by University of Chicago psychologist Marc Berman, results showed that:

- Green spaces near schools promote cognitive development in children and green views near children's homes promote self-control behaviours
- Adults assigned to public housing units in neighbourhoods with more green space showed better attentional functioning than those assigned to units with less access to natural environments
- Exposure to natural environments improves working memory, cognitive flexibility and attentional control, while exposure to urban environments is linked to attention deficits

Further [research](#) carried out by mental health charity Mind found that 71% of participants reported a drop in feelings of depression after a walk in nature, and spending at least [120 minutes](#) in nature is associated with general good health and wellbeing.

The statistics certainly speak for themselves, but how can we incorporate the natural world into our day-to-day lives for better wellbeing? Here's a few ideas to help you get started...

Take a 10-minute walk: While embarking on an outdoor adventure might seem like a thrill, we understand that not everyone has the time or opportunity to set out on an epic hiking expedition or hour-long ramble. However, taking a short 10-minute walk is not only beneficial for heart health, bone strength, brain function, and calorie burning, but it can also boost mindfulness by helping us become

more aware of ourselves and the world around us

Bring your indoor activities outside: Becoming more connected to nature can happen with just a few simple swaps. By drinking your morning coffee in the garden, taking your laptop to a local park or going for a walk and talk, you can boost your vitamin D and enjoy lungfuls of fresh air without having to disrupt your day

Grow or pick fresh food: From starting a simple veggie patch to foraging for fresh herbs and fruits, the practice of growing, gardening, and gathering can help to reduce stress, boost concentration, and even lessen reliance on certain medications. If you're short on space, why not try a compact window box with a few easy herbs?

Volunteer with local eco groups: Whether you plan a group litter picking walk, volunteer for a conservation project or plant a bounty of seeds to encourage bumblebees, you can achieve a sense of fulfilment, gain confidence, meet new people, and become better connected to your local community when you devote more time to eco-based projects

Listen to calming nature sounds: We've talked about bringing the inside outdoors, but how about experiencing the beauty of nature in the comfort of your home? When life gets in the way of getting out and about, try listening to natural soundscapes such as birdsong, ocean waves, rainfall or rivers. While it might not be quite as beneficial as the real thing, studies have shown that natural sounds can reduce stress and promote a more positive mental outlook

Don't wait to discover how embracing the natural world can benefit your physical and mental wellbeing. Whether you start with small, simple steps or shoot for the stars, just remember that there's a big, wide world out there just waiting to soothe your soul.

If your employer offers Vivup's Employee Assistance Programme, there are lots

of useful resources and downloadable workbooks to help you care for your wellbeing in a practical, proactive way. You can also access a 24-hour telephone helpline for responsive, confidential and totally independent advice should you or a colleague need mental health support.

Sources

[Nurtured by nature \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org)

[Ecotherapy / Nature Therapy \(goodtherapy.org\)](https://www.goodtherapy.org)

[Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing | Scientific Reports](#)

[10 Surprising Benefits Of: A 10 Minute Walk \(wisebread.com\)](https://www.wisebread.com)

[Why gardening is good for your mental health - Thrive](#)

[A synthesis of health benefits of natural sounds and their distribution in national parks | PNAS](#)