

Nature & Your Health

by Angela Poch www.BodyMindHealthCoach.com

Introduction

We've all heard about eating right, exercising, and dealing with stress to be healthy. But nature? What has nature got to do with health? Trees, plants and even grass, filter pollution and other impurities, add oxygen to the air, provide peace and calm. Just one article on the subject states, "Research published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health reports that people living close to green space have lower rates of anxiety and depression and superior physical health than those living in dense cities. The findings were based on the health records of people registered with 195 family doctors in 95 practices across the Netherlands. In total, the practices serve a population of almost 350,000." <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/167566.php>

If your city doesn't have a green space, perhaps you get involved in creating one. We need to step away from all the artificial stuff around us. Clutter, plastic, cement, flashing lights, noise. These are not the best for our brains and bodies so taking time out to get back to nature is really important. Or maybe you are ready to consider moving just a little closer to nature?

Natures health benefits include

- Fresh air

- Negative ions (good for improving mood)

- Calming effect

- De-stressing effect

- Social opportunities - camping, picnicking, etc.

Of course nature also provides many exercise opportunities that are very enjoyable like:

- Swimming

- Kayaking or canoeing

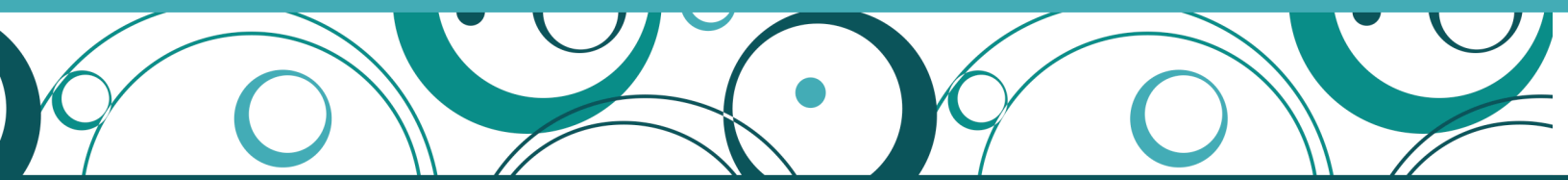
- Hiking

- Biking

Living Green

Ok, so living green refers to environmentally friendly, but I think it applies here to. Living IN the green. Either wide open plains with a beautiful garden and shrubs, viewing the stars at night and amazing sunsets. Or a château in the mountains with grand views all around. Or perhaps closer to work and shopping, an extra large lot with trees but still close to amenities.

We can't all move to the country, for one reason or another, but it is a great choice for anyone wanting to live longer and wanting a higher quality of life. That doesn't mean everyone can own a hundred acre farm, but many can move to a more rural location. And for those who can't move we should bring as much country living to the city as we can. So no matter where you live you can green it up.



Country living provides the following:

- Healthy social values and less stress – lower crime, more social or community involvement, slower paced
- More physical labour and outdoor activity
- Outside in the sunshine and fresh air
- Ability to live on less

So let's look at each of these and explore them both for those who can and will move to a more rural location and for those who will be staying in the city. At least for now. ;)

There are certain values more common among country folk, although the fast pace life has met country living too. Still, there is lower crime, less stress, it is more social or community based, and usually slower paced. These values add to quality of life and longevity. So how do you create these values? First of all, awareness. Know these are important and then figure out how you can adapt them in your life. Do you know any of your neighbors? Have a neighborhood block party. One family created a "community picnic table" in their own yard. They encourage people to stop and visit, as well as just a sense of belonging. What about joining or starting a neighborhood watch program? www.nnw.org These programs create a social event, build community, and help reduce crime by up to 16%. <https://journalistsresource.org/studies/government/criminal-justice/us-justice-department-neighborhood-watch-reduce-crime> What ideas can you come up with.

More physical labour – shoveling snow, fixing fences, raking leaves, walking to the mail, gardening, and so much more. We seen from our exercise lesson we need to move. And MOVE more often. We sit around far too much. More and more cities are providing bicycle lanes, making it safer to use your bike. You many have to built up to longer trips, like biking to work, but it's really worth it. Gardening has been shown to reduce stress, create a sense of calm, connect with nature, as well as the physical benefits. You can garden on a pretty small lot, and even container gardening can be done in apartments. Plus many cities are starting community gardens. Community gardens are another great way to not only get exercise but build on social culture, creating an environment of peace and joy. So whether you are in a small apartment or have a country home, plant a few flowers and then move on to some veggies. Your mind and body will thank you.

Gardening leads us to the next key to country living health, getting outside in the sunshine and fresh air. Horseback riding, dog walking, hiking, canoeing, and so much more. We need sunshine for vitamin D, which many health professionals agree we are often low in. Vitamin D deficiency leads to a host of problems. Sunshine also aids the body in production of melatonin and serotonin. These hormones are needed for sleep, rejuvenation, and mental health. In fact, both of these are often low in patients with depression and anxiety disorders. What about skin cancer? Most experts say as long as you don't overdo it, and by that they mean, get sunburnt, moderate sun exposure is not likely to increase your risk. "excessive UVR exposure accounts for only 0.1% of the total global burden of disease in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), according to the 2006 World Health Organization (WHO) report The Global Burden of Disease Due to Ultraviolet Radiation. DALYs measure how much a person's expectancy of healthy life is reduced by premature death or disability caused by disease." <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2290997/> And along with sunshine we need fresh air. Which brings us to air pollution. Just doing a quick search in the Medical News Database brought up 100 articles, here are just a few titles.

- Air pollution may affect human health via bacteria changes in respiratory tract
- A fifth of dementia cases may be caused by air pollution
- Heart disease risk may be increased with air pollution exposure

- Air pollution-linked premature births cost US \$4.33 billion annually
- Rising pollution levels linked to increased strokes

Getting out of the city as often as you are able, can quite honestly improve your health. And with camping supplies coming down in price, for under \$250 your family can get a tent, sleeping bags, and a couple other necessities to take control of your weekends. And even less for a single person. Get out and explore the world around you, it doesn't have to cost a fortune. Older, or don't like roughing it? We found inexpensive cots online for our older achy bones. Makes a world of difference!

Country living can provide the ability to live on less, especially with the tiny house movement. Your garden provides food, taxes are less especially if you do a hobby farm, and you spend less money on eating out and going to movies. No Starbucks or Tim Hortons at every corner. You can choose to live on less in the city as well, but it can be more difficult with all the temptations out there. To help, you can join the "minimalist" movement for support and advice. This is a relatively new phenomena, but people who join are reporting greater happiness and less stress. We simply crave too much stuff and that stuff actually holds us back from what we really want. Weird, right? Myself, I got rid of over half my cloths and it feels great! Now, I can wear all my favourites all the time, and I'm not tempted to spend a fortune on something new because I enjoy what I already have. This one thing, simplifying your life in terms of stuff, can be a great improvement to your health by reducing stress. Less stuff to worry about fixing, keeping nice, replacing. We really do need to let go of what we don't use. I encourage you to look more into this concept on your own, because the key to happiness isn't money, houses, cars, or stuff, it's your attitude toward life.

Summary

So many of the principles found in country living, like getting more active in your community, getting outside more, enjoying nature, and simplifying your life, can be applied to wherever you are now, and you may find it's worth considering a move. Your life is more important than your house, apartment, or job.

This handout is taken from the "Optimal Health - Your Journey to a Long & Happy Life" a free course on health at www.BodyMindHealthCoach.com