HEALTH BENEFITS OF NATURE
Support your health and wellness with natural world connections

Approximately 83 percent of Americans now live in urban areas[1], and many adults spend around 90 percent of their time indoors[2]. While living in an urban area offers some social and economic benefits, research shows that issues like noise and air pollution, traffic, overcrowding, and reduced physical activity negatively impact mental and physical health. Increased urbanization is associated with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression[3].

Stress and sedentary lifestyles increase risk for chronic disease, which is the leading cause of death and debilitating health conditions. Furthermore, in 2022, 23.1 percent of adults experienced some form of mental illness[4]. Spending time in nature offers protective benefits against the negative impacts of stress[5], while being active outdoors offers additional physical health advantages.

55% higher risk for mental illness in adults with the lowest levels of exposure to nature when they were children[6].

1 in 3 adults ages 50-80 reported feeling isolated from others[7].

21% decrease in cortisol levels after 20-30 minutes of time in nature[8].

BENEFITS OF TIME SPENT IN NATURE

Supports brain and mental health
Exposure to nature improves memory function, attention, and problem-solving[5]. Individuals living in urban areas close to green spaces have less mental distress and an increased sense of wellbeing[9].

Reduces stress response
Twenty minutes spent in nature reduces levels of cortisol[8], a hormone that regulates inflammation, blood sugar, blood pressure, immunity, and how you respond to stress.

Increases physical activity
People who spend more time outdoors are more likely to engage in higher levels of health promoting physical activity, and spend less time sedentary[10]. Engaging in physical activity in nature is linked to decreases in heart rate, cholesterol, and body-mass index (BMI), as well as mood improvements[11].

Reduces risk for chronic disease
Increased physical activity and decreased stress associated with green space is linked to decreased risk for cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers, along with decreased inflammation and improved immune function[5].

Decreases risk of social isolation
As we age, we are more at risk for social isolation and loneliness, which increase risk for cognitive decline, depression, and heart disease[7]. Being in nature with others provides an opportunity for meaningful social connections.

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(cont'd)

HOW TO GET STARTED

🌱 Aim to spend at least **two hours** per week in nature[12].

🌱 Natural areas with **higher levels of biodiversity** might offer more extensive benefits, though urban parks, views of trees, and even images of nature seen indoors can positively affect mood and wellbeing[9].

🌱 **Blue spaces**, like oceans lakes, waterfalls and rivers, provide similar health benefits[13].

🌱 **Spending time in nature** can benefit adults of all ages. Enjoy nature alone, with family and friends, look for opportunities to connect with others and build community, or volunteer for a nature-focused organization.

TRY IT!

- **Get your steps in**: Add walks around the neighborhood or a nearby park into your weekly routine.
- **Visit a Sarasota County park, trail, or natural area**: Hike, walk, paddle, bike, and more, for a healthy challenge and an opportunity to learn more about nature around us.
- **Accessibility options**: Some Sarasota County parks offer beach mats, beach wheelchairs, accessible kayak launches, paved trails, or ADA-approved fitness stations.
- **Connect with others**: Join a nature-oriented club, our guided EcoWalks, or meet a friend and enjoy nature together.
- **Volunteer outdoors**: Environmental volunteering improves physical activity, self-reported wellness, and mood[14].
- **Art outdoors**: Sketch, color, or paint what you see. Start a nature journal for deeper observation, connection, and creative expression.
- **Practice mindfulness**: Find a favorite place to sit outside and use all your senses to experience the world around you.
- **Backyard birding**: Listen to birdsong and look for birds right from home.
- **Gardening**: Tending a garden teaches about healthy eating, gets time in nature, and builds skills.
- **Bring nature indoors**: Listen to soothing nature sounds; decorate indoor spaces with nature imagery or plants.

Learn More
For opportunities to connect with nature, resources, and more, scan this QR code.

tiny.cc/ufsaraext_natureandhealth

QUESTIONS?
sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota | **sarasota@ifas.ufl.edu** | **311 (or 941.861.5000)**

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