

Outdoors health tips from the Posse

Outdoors: The natural stress reliever



Mark Rackay
Tips from the Posse

There was a place I used to retreat to. The place was a secret place, deep in the woods. It was nothing special, just a giant old oak tree near a pond. But, it was my place. A place where all of the stress of the day —

school, parents, kids — would all naturally fade away. I have not visited that old oak tree in 45 years but I hope it is still there, perhaps helping another kid with his problems.

Bradford Angier wrote a book titled “The Master Backwoodsman.” In his book, he referred to his place in the woods to get rid of stress as “in back of beyond.”

Today, I still find comfort and solace in the woods, searching for my own “in back of beyond.” I love those long walks in the aspen trees when the leaves are gone and an air of loneliness surrounds everything. Seems I have to retreat deeper into the woods these days to find the same peace, but it is still there.

After surviving the holidays with all the overeating, visitors, presents, decorating, parties, kids, shopping, well, the list goes on forever. Stress takes its toll on all of us.

Then comes January, when the honk of wild geese is in the air and the coal is getting low in the bin. I have already broken all my New Years resolutions. Stress also gets delivered to you in the form of bills from credit cards wanting bucks for all those presents. More good tidings of stress.

Now is the time to try nature’s stress reliever. Head outside and go for a walk in the woods. Whether you go for a jog, hike or run, disconnect from the cell phone. This will allow you to focus on what you are doing.

The cold and flu virus occur more in the winter because people gather indoors. By being outside, in the fresh air, you are less likely to catch a virus because you are not breathing



The secret to receiving stress is outdoors, fresh air and woods. Take the snow machine up for a romp in the snow and watch the stress melt away. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

that recycled air everyone else is.

Being outdoors is good for your physical health, but it also is beneficial for your mental wellbeing. Time spent outdoors reduces fatigue and stress, and can also be helpful with depression and anxiety.

A study from 2010 that was published in Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine, found that people who walked in a forest amongst the trees had lower blood pressure and levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) afterwards than those who strolled through a city environment.

Exercise is, and always has been, a fantastic stress reliever. Good cardio, such as running, jogging, power walking, aerobics or bike riding, reduces stress and anxiety. The experts state we need at least 30 minutes a day, three times a week, for good heart health.

Take that workout outside. A study at the University of Essex found that the color green, such as that found on trees, grass and other plants, made exercise feel easier. The study tested bicyclist peddling in front of a shade showing green, red and gray images. Those exercising in front of green

showed less mood disturbances and reported that they felt lower exertion during their cycling. Other research has shown that those who exercise outside, rather than inside at a gym, are more likely to return for future workouts.

If during your workday, you feel a bit groggy, skip the caffeine break and head outside. Research also shows that a 20-minute walk outside can wake you up just as well as a cup of coffee.

One of the reasons being outside helps relieve stress is because of scents. The smell of many types of flowers, such as jasmines, roses and lilacs, has been proven to decrease stress. The scent of fresh pine has the same effect and helps lower depression and anxiety.

The human body has a tough time getting enough vitamin D from foods, because so many do not carry it. Approximately 80 percent of our vitamin D comes from the sunshine, which is more difficult to get during the winter months. Vitamin D is necessary for bone growth, cell growth, reducing inflammation and proper function of our immune system. A 20-minute walk a day in the sunshine

will usually take care of your vitamin D needs.

Being in the great outdoors does not have to be a strict exercise regime. I get just as much stress relief when outside playing as with any other activity. Throw the ball for the dogs, chase the kids or a round of hoops, can all be beneficial.

When the time allows, head up to the hills and go for a snowmobile ride or break out the cross-country skis. The mountains are very beautiful and serene during the winter months and none of the summer crowds are around.

I guess the moral of the story is if you want to relieve stress, head outside. That is a concept I have no trouble accepting as I head up to my secret place on the mountain. It is not quite located at the end of the earth, but if you stand up, you can see it from there. ●

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