

## - Health / Exercise

## Head outside and be active

Ease a busy or anxious mind and bring a fresh perspective by exercising in nature.

BBC Wildlife Magazine · 9 Apr 2020 · 4 · Introduced as a national health programme by the Japanese government in the 1980s, shinrin-yoku is the result of scientific studies that showed that two hours of mindful exploration in a forest could lower blood pressure and cortisol levels and improve co

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**Wildlife & Wellbeing**

*"I turn to the natural world all the time when I am stressed and, increasingly, when I am not stressed, as a preventive measure. A walk in the park is just part of my near-daily routine now. It puts me in a better mood and it makes my dog happy."*  
**Florence Williams** podcaster and author of *The Nature Fix* (WW Norton & Company, £12.99)

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Exercising in nature is particularly beneficial, says Dr Rangan Chatterjee. "If we exercise in nature, rather than in a gym, we tend to exercise for longer. One study found that people who exercise in the outdoors on a regular basis have higher levels of serotonin, a hormone that reduces tiredness and helps keep us in a happier mood."

Immersive experiences in nature have also been found to have a significant impact on our wellbeing. In Norway, a country repeatedly ranked in the top 10 in the United Nations World Happiness Report, this concept is known as *friluftsliv* (pronounced free-loofts-liv), roughly translated as 'open-air living' or 'free air life'. It describes an attitude rather than a specific activity or exercise and it's an essential part of the Nordic lifestyle.

The key to *friluftsliv* is consciously using your time in nature to help you clarify your thoughts, let go of stress and improve your mood. "Friluftsliv can be an amazing view, picking hedgerow fruit, going for a hilltop hike, breathing in the ocean air, but it can also be shovelling snow, digging in the ground, moving stones and the freedom not to think or worry, just 'be'," says Norwegian life coach Anne Eriksen.

**The great outdoors**  
 The freedom to go outside and roam is also closely connected with the idea of *friluftsliv*, explains Canadian author Oliver Luke Delorie in *The Nordic Art Of Friluftsliv*. It's no coincidence that Norway's Outdoor Recreation Act permits walking or camping pretty much everywhere as long as locals and wildlife are respected. "This open-air philosophy cannot help but encourage exploration, adventure and a life-long respect for the environment," he concludes.

Also related to the idea of framing, this time among trees, is the immersive Japanese practice of forest bathing, or *shinrin-yoku*. "Bathting" in the forest atmosphere uses the senses to connect to nature by noticing flora and fauna, sounds, scents and textures and shifting the perspective from the macro to the micro.

**Did you know?**  
 A 90-minute walk through a natural environment decreases brain activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, which is linked to negative thoughts.

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