- Naturopathy

Forests are essential, ecologically and for health

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Forests are really essential. The trees and vegetation are our main source of oxygen. Without them, we will slowly suffocate in our own carbon dioxide emissions that we breath out. The forests' denizens, animals, birds, insects, and all creatures great and small, thrive in the forest environment that is balanced. Life on earth will cease if all our forests are denuded.



Forests act as watersheds, preventing landslides and flooding. It is no wonder we are experiencing flooding all over the country, since we have only 30 percent forest cover left due to logging, mining, agriculture and human habitation.

But forests are also important for human health, not just in the sense that we derive sustenance from forest products, but in terms of its direct effects on our immune system, heart, blood pressure, sleep and even mood.

China-born physician-immunologist, Dr. Qing Li, at Tokyo's Nippon Medical School spent years studying shinrin-yoku (forest bathing).

His study shows that when a person enters a forest, several things happen. Walking in a forest activates and increases the natural killer cells (cells that defend us from viruses and bacteria but also seek out and destroy mutant tumor cells.) Their counts and activity increased by around 50 percent and the effects aren't transient, lasting up to 30 days after leaving the forest.

Trees emit natural airborne chemicals called phytoncides (actually essential oils like the pine scent in Baguio) that protect them from insects, fungi and bacteria. A person walking through a forest also breathes in these organic compounds which trigger intracellular anti-cancer proteins such as perforin, granzymes and granulysin.

In the forest environment, the body's stress hormones (adrenalin, noradrenaline and cortisol) levels drop resulting in lower blood pressure and heart rates. Mood testing shows drops in levels of anxiety, anger, fatigue and mental fog. It improved sleep quality and has a preventive effect on insomnia.

A control group who walked through an urban setting showed no difference in NK cells and anti-cancer proteins. This shows that a forest environment really helps us cope with life stresses and

even promote anti-cancer activity in the body. This study has started a new discipline called forest medicine, a new category of lifestyle and preventive medicine, and Dr. Li is considered the leading expert in this field.

A similar effect occurs even in city parks. Unfortunately, we have very few and sparsely planted city parks in our concrete jungles. We can practice forest immersion in city/village parks on a weekly basis by walking and taking in the fresh air that the parks offer. Dr. Li's studies have shown reduction in anxiety, depression, anger, fatigue and confusion. It improves positive feelings and mood, reducing stress hormone levels.

Bringing in the forest into our homes and offices through indoor plants and aromatherapy with organic oils will likewise improve our moods through the smell of the forest on a daily basis. Even viewing forest scenes with its sights and sounds have a beneficial effect on our health.

But it is in the forest that these effects are maximal. You should have at least two hours of forest immersion. To achieve longer immune-boosting effects, six hours can boost the immune system for a week. Three days and two nights of forest immersion will boost the immune system for four weeks.

The implications for our modern world of this new insight that forests play in our lives and health are important. Dr. Li says forest medicine should be developed in a new preventive medicine discipline for lifestyle-related diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, depression, sleep disorders and even some cancers. His research is consistent with studies that show

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boosting the immune system to fight cancers like using MRNA to boost the immune system is a viable method (Vaccine cancers becoming a reality, Sept. 22, 2026).

In Kyushu where we stayed for a week, I was astounded by the sight of towering trees and lush vegetation during tours where tourists like myself sought out the natural beauty of this island. So, I thought: what if we preserve our forests, replant what was denuded and turn them into tourist attractions, offering forest immersion as a natural healing method?

We always want a quick fix, thus, we mine and log away and destroy our beautiful natural resources, enriching a few but endangering and actually killing our people by the floods and landslides that happen in the aftermath.

Let's conserve and protect our country's natural beauty, keep our people safe and healthier and attract more tourists to our natural bounty, in the process, creating a healing environment for all. Material wealth is nothing if we get sick and die early. Forest bathing is not just a dream. It can be a reality, if we all go for it.

Save our forests!