

Time outdoors as a child aids mental health as an adult

HEALTH NATURALLY



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Time spent in nature is typically a relaxing and soothing experience in the moment. New research is also suggesting that the positive effects of regularly spending time in nature can be quite long-lasting.

This research found that adults who spent time in nature regularly as a child had, on average, better mental health compared with other adults who spent less time in nature as a child.

This research, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, enrolled almost 3,600 adults from Spain, The Netherlands, Lithuania and the United Kingdom. These adults were questioned about their time in nature when they were children, including purposeful time in nature (i.e. hiking, camping) and non-purposeful (i.e. unstructured play time outdoors).

A psychological test was used to assess the level of anxiety, feelings of depression and feelings of energy and fatigue among the participants over the past four weeks.

The results showed that compared with adults with more



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exposure to nature as children, the adults who were less exposed to nature as children had poorer scores on the study's mental health testing.

These results "show the importance of childhood exposure to natural spaces for the development of a nature-appreciating attitude and a healthy psychological state in adulthood. Therefore, it is important to recognize the implications of growing in up in environments

with limited opportunities for exposure to nature," said Wilma Zijlema, the study's coordinator.

Additionally, the participants who spent less time in nature as children viewed spending time in nature as less important to them personally. "[I]n general, participants with lower childhood exposure to nature gave a lower importance to natural environments," said Myriam Preuss, the main author of the study.

According to the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, past research has connected more time in nature with better cogni-

tive development and improved physical health, coordination, balance and agility. This new research from this institute supports other evidence showing that outdoor time is an import factor in the establishing of good mental health in children.

Getting outdoors is an important part of staying active and healthy. Outdoor recreational activities like playing catch, playing in a sandbox or hiking are a great way to get some outdoor time. Additionally, doing outdoor chores like gardening, digging or clearing brush can help us to feel more connected with nature and achieve health benefits as a result.

Do you have questions about the impact of nature on your health or the health of your children? Ask your naturopathic doctor.

Dr. Colin MacLeod ND is a naturopathic doctor practicing full-time in Upper Tantalion at MacLeod Naturopathic. His practice focuses on pain management and maintaining health through physical activity and diet.