

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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The mental health benefits of spending time outdoors

Have you ever noticed the sense of calm you feel after spending time in nature? In addition to physical health benefits, outdoor activities have also been shown to promote and maintain your mental health.

Being in green spaces (such as gardens, parks or forests) can significantly reduce cortisol (a stress hormone), and raise endorphin levels and dopamine production.

Additionally, the vitamin D you get from natural light can help regulate your sleep cycle. Sleeping away from artificial light and waking up with natural sunlight can also reset your circadian rhythm, which will result in better-quality sleeps and likely leave you feeling more alert and capable the following day.

That's why one of the best things you can do right now is get outside and take advantage of summer at its peak. Whether it's tending to a community garden, taking a walk through your local park, or having a picnic outdoors, contact with nature can rejuvenate your body and mind.

What does it take to reap the benefits?

While some people can't get enough time outdoors, many of us may spend most of our time inside, even in the summer months. Your schedule, lifestyle, and access to green spaces can all play a role, but research has shown that spending at least two hours a week outdoors will allow you to reap the maximum mental health benefits.



Plant a little happiness

If you're looking to sustain a connection to nature while indoors, consider adding a few plants to your space. Plants can lower blood pressure, increase attentiveness, raise productivity at work, lower anxiety and improve overall well-being. They also improve air quality.

If you, or someone you know, is struggling with a mental health problem, help is available. Call the Addiction and Mental Health helpline at 1-877-303-2642 or go to www.ahs.ca/helpintoughtimes.