

# DISCONNECT TO RECONNECT

## NURTURE THROUGH NATURE: THERE'S NO APP FOR THAT

Technology follows us everywhere and can track almost anything we do. According to Statistics Canada, in 2016, 76% of Canadians own a smartphone. Among 15-34 year-olds, that stat rises to 94%! The use of smartphones and smart devices by so many people, so often, for so many things, means an almost endless state of connection. If there is a task on our to do list that seems disconnected, you can be sure "there's an app for that" too! We are always connected. We are always "on". We are becoming logged-in 24/7. Technology has become the very fabric of our lives.

While there may be benefits to the extent of our digital connectivity, we are at risk of not fulfilling our deep-rooted need as human beings for authentic connection to each other and the "disconnected" world. We glorify being "busy" with constant stimulation and living the fast-paced life, opposite to our natural rhythm. A lack of connection to the natural cycles that create and support us can have an impact on our physical health, mental and emotional wellbeing, and our environment. Pandora's Box has been opened, and while we can't pack technology back in, we can find fun and meaningful ways to spend some time disconnected to reconnect with the natural world around us.



*"If the sight of the blue skies fills you with joy, if a blade of grass springing up in the fields has power to move you, if the simple things of nature have a message that you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive." Eleonora Duse*

Embrace the spiritual and emotional strength that can be gained when we commune with our natural world. Nature can quiet a busy mind, open your heart, and cultivate inner peace. It transforms, heals, and awakens the quality of your health and life.

### Benefits of Nature on Mental Health

#### Reduces Stress & Anxiety

When in nature, our bodies release less of the stress hormone, cortisol, and more natural endorphins, which promote happy thoughts and good feelings.

#### Increases Attention & Focus

Studies show that nature can restore fatigue caused by cognitive tasks that require prolonged attention. It doesn't have to be an hour hike in the woods. According to studies, taking "green" microbreaks, like a short walk outside or staring at nature through a window, showed an increase in attention and greater productivity in the workplace.

#### Boosts Mood

Nature walks tend to correlate with mood improvement. A study on forest "bathing" showed positive effects on brain activity that supported relaxation and a boost in mood, after 15 minutes of walking in a bamboo forest.

#### Increases Creativity

Nature is a powerful antidote to the distraction of our digital life. A walk in the woods activates the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for the imagination network. A 2012 study showed a 50% increase in creative performance on a creative problem-solving task after four days of exposure to nature.

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### JUST BE... AND EXPERIENCE NATURE'S CALMING EFFECTS

- ✓ **Be Grounded.** "Grounding" is a practice in many cultures that connects you to the earth's natural electromagnetic field believed to bring balance, connection, and a sense of anchoring. Make contact with the earth by going barefoot in the grass, lying in a field, or placing your palm on a tree.
- ✓ **Be Dirty.** There's nothing like the feeling of getting your hands dirty in a spring garden, or as kids, playing in the mud. There is good reason for our attraction to dirt. Getting dirty isn't only good for your immune system (exposure to bacteria builds our immunity), but it's also good for the soul. Soil is a living system, just like our bodies. In studies, exposure to a specific soil-born bacteria (*Mycobacterium vaccae*) altered the brain chemistry of mice activating happy hormones and neurons in the brain.
- ✓ **Be Green.** Can't seem to find enough time to get outdoors? Purchase some houseplants, and bring the outdoors in. Plants give us a sense of responsibility requiring care and maintenance to thrive. They can provide a sense of purpose when we otherwise may not feel connected to others or our natural surroundings. They keep the air clean, provide some joyful colour, and generally just make us feel good. Don't have a green thumb? Care for some succulents, make a small tabletop terrarium, or create a rock or water garden.
- ✓ **Be Mindful.** It's beautiful. Take it all in! Simply look outside your window and notice the colours, shapes, and sounds of the outdoors, the blue colour of the sky, the imaginative creatures in the clouds, the way the wind blows. Start your day by allowing the sun to wake you, open the window and breathe in the morning air. Allow the natural world to ground you and start your day with a positive intention, regardless of your circumstances.



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