



# Spend Time Outdoors

## CHALLENGE

Get outside to boost health & happiness

## Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Spend Time Outdoors."
2. Create a plan to spend more time outside (aim for 120+ minutes a week)
3. Keep a record of your completed health challenge in case your organization requires documentation.



When the young Cheryl Strayed reached a tipping point in her life, she wasn't happy.

Her marriage failed. Her mother died. She bounced from one job to the next as a journalist, waitress, office worker, youth advocate, and medical technician.

She made a lot of unhealthy choices. And she knew something had to change.

So she filled a backpack with a few essentials, put on some hiking boots, and headed for the great outdoors.

For the next three months, Strayed hiked north from California to Washington, along 1,100 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail. The journey changed her life and inspired her best-selling memoir, *Wild*.

You may not be planning to hike a thousand miles or go on a three-month camping trip. But spending some time outside is good for your health and happiness. Take the month-long health challenge to Spend Time Outdoors.

5 health benefits of spending time in nature  
<https://tinyurl.com/2vxb7es5>

## The Fabulous Fresh-Air Quiz

How much do you know about the health benefits of spending time outdoors? Take the quiz to find out.



### T F

1.   The average adult spends 75% of their time inside (home, office, store, car).
2.   People who spend 120+ minutes per week outside are happier than those who don't.
3.   Spending time in natural settings (parks, trails, greenspace, beach, etc.) can help reduce stress and lower blood pressure.
4.   Just a few minutes in the sun each day can boost vitamin D levels, improve bone health, and strengthen the immune system.
5.   Exercising outside increases serotonin levels and helps reduce depression and anxiety.

How did you do? Most adults spend 93% of their time indoors.<sup>1</sup> How much time do you spend outside per day or per week? Research shows spending time outdoors in natural settings can have a positive impact on your physical and mental health.

Answers: 1. False, 2. True, 3. True, 4. True, 5. True.

## Step Outside: 11 Health Benefits of the Great Outdoors

Have you ever felt a little stressed out, overwhelmed, or in a funk? Or maybe you're looking for ways to improve your health and prevent disease. Do this: Step outside a little more often.

Researchers looked at data from 143 studies and found that spending time outdoors may help:<sup>2</sup>

1. Improve mood
2. Lower blood pressure
3. Reduce stress
4. Increase longevity



5. Prevent and control diabetes
6. Raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels
7. Lower the risk for certain types of cancers

Research also shows spending time outdoors can help:<sup>3</sup>

8. Increase vitamin D levels
9. Strengthen the immune system
10. Support weight management
11. Boost creativity

# 15 Simple Ways to Spend More Time Outside

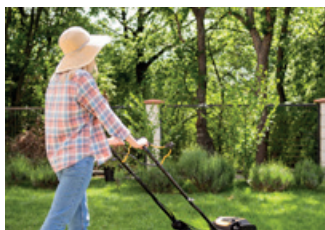
Want to improve your health and feel happier? Spend more time outside.

You don't have to spend three months outside or walk 1,100 miles like Cheryl Strayed did on the Pacific Crest Trail.

Instead, spend a few minutes outside every day (and maybe a little more on the weekend). Check out these simple ways to spend more time outside:

## At Home

**1 Work in the yard.** Mow the lawn. Water the flowers. Plant a garden. If you don't have a yard, help a friend who does.



**2 Eat en plein air.** That's French for "outside." Make breakfast, lunch or dinner, and enjoy it outside. Try the deck, backyard, balcony or driveway.

**3 Chat with neighbors.** Remember this? Most adults spend 93% of their time indoors. Take a walk and visit your neighbors.

**4 Get the mail.** If you have a community mailbox, take a walk to get it (instead of driving up to the curb...you've seen people do this, right?)

**5 Go for a walk.** Walk the dog. Take a stroll through the neighborhood. If it's close enough, walk to complete simple errands. Just walk to the end of the street. Or swap a gym workout for jogging or running outside.

## At Work

**6 Host a walking meeting.** You know...instead of sitting in a conference room or staring at a screen on a video call.



**7 Eat lunch outside.** Take your lunch to an outdoor eating area or nearby park. If you go out to eat, eat outside when the weather's good.

**8 Take a walk break...outside.** Take a short walk break a couple times a day. Just 15 to 20 minutes can boost your mood and creative juices.

**9 Read outside.** Maybe you've got a lot of paperwork to sift through. Or you want to take a break to read something a little lighter like a novel or magazine. Find a place where you can read outside.

10 work-week tips to spend more time outside  
<https://tinyurl.com/wr7efx2s>

## HealthyRx: Spend 120+ minutes a week outside



Starting to get the picture? Spending time outdoors is good for your health and happiness. But how much time makes a difference?

- **120+ minutes per week.** In a study of 20,000 people, researchers found that people who spend at least 120 minutes a week in nature are happier and healthier than those who don't.<sup>4</sup>
- **Break it up.** Researchers also found that spending less than 120 minutes per week outside wasn't enough to provide measurable health benefits. Break it up into smaller chunks of time that fit your schedule.
- **Don't forget the sunscreen.** If you're going to be outside for longer than 10+ minutes in direct sun, don't forget the sunscreen. Sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 30 or higher blocks 97% of the sun's harmful rays.<sup>5</sup>

Mood makeover: Get back to nature  
<https://tinyurl.com/2p9fsjce>

## Out and About

**10 Park far away...** when you go to the store. Then walk across the parking lot.

**11 Go for a hike.** Find a trail, nature park or greenspace in your area and hike or walk.



**12 Plan a picnic.** Pack a lunch with your favorite foods and find a place to have a picnic like a park, beach, or even your backyard.

**13 Try camping or glamping.** Pack your tent, sleeping bags and camping gear for a night in the outdoors. Or make it a little easier and stay in an RV, cabin, yurt, or rental where you can get away and get outside.

**14 Look up at the sky.** Catch a sunset. Or go outside on a clear night and look up at the sky.

**15 Go exploring.** Chances are pretty good there's some outdoor gems in your area you haven't been to yet. Go exploring. Get outside and visit a park, trail, lake, beach, or natural area you haven't been to before.

## References

1. Environmental Protection Agency. (2021). Indoor air quality: What are the trends in indoor air quality and their effects on human health? From: <https://tinyurl.com/4juun484>
2. Twohig-Bennett, C., et al. (2018). The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes. *Environmental Research*, 166: 628-637. From: <https://tinyurl.com/yz5xtepa>
3. Seppala, E., et al. (2017). Why you should tell your team to take a break and go outside. *Harvard Business Review*. From: <https://tinyurl.com/mv3uy9bk>
4. White, M., et al. (2019). Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Scientific Reports*, 9: 7730. From: <https://tinyurl.com/mrvf49kd>
5. American Academy of Dermatology Association. (2022). Sunscreen FAQs. From: <https://tinyurl.com/m895sb53>



# Spend Time Outdoors

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### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, or add to your digital calendar).
2. Create a plan to spend more time outdoors.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to spend more time outdoors.
4. Review your progress at the end of each day, week, and at the end of the month. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge™	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____		
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I spent time outdoors  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I exercised at least 30 minutes

### Other wellness projects completed this month:

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_