University of Richmond Employee Wellness

Happiness Can’t Be as Simple as a Walk in the Park… Can It?

Sitting in a tent in the Peruvian Andes, my 9-year-old son looked like an elf, mostly because his little face was exuding fairy kingdom joy. “I’m so happy,” he said, clutching his knees to his chest. “I don’t know why, but I’m just so happy.” At the time, it seemed as if our happiness stemmed from earnest reasons like relief and achievement. But looking back now, I think that after spending so much time in the tropical highlands and forests, we were both just plain—there’s no other way to put it—giddy.

I know: Giddy is not a word that brings John Muir immediately to mind. Nature is supposed to be stately, serene, serious. But go take a walk and observe what really happens. You may skip. You may make crazy faces when you hear a birdcall.

Evolved To Be High On Nature

Such antics are not the only human behaviors you’ll observe in nature. But being high on nature—in the throes of what’s lately being called (too cutely) outdoorsphins and vitamin G (for green)—essentially means being in a supreme comfort zone, say scientists, a place of freedom where it’s OK to act as if we’ve been drinking from overly fermented plants. We evolved to enjoy places rich in natural resources because they represented a good turn of events. Richard Ryan, a professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, has researched how being outdoors can even make us nicer. “In nature,” he says, “we feel more in touch with who we really are and what we want to do.”

Who you are, apparently, is someone pretty spectacular, someone more energized and generous (studies have found both), unjangled (a 2010 study showed that long walks through forests over 2 days lowered stress-hormone levels, pulse rate, and blood pressure), vital (after just 20 minutes a day in nature, according to one of Ryan’s studies), and ecstatic (neuroscientists say viewing natural settings increases interactions in the brain’s pleasure receptors). And likely less blue: The University of Essex in the UK found that 30 minutes of walking in a green scene reduced depression in 71% of participants.

On The Trail, Floating In Pharmaceuticals

The reason being outdoors performs like a drug may be, astonishingly, because you are floating in quasi-pharmaceuticals. This is the gist of new research into the microbes of nature. A Japanese researcher has zeroed in on airborne antifungal and antibacterial compounds called phytoncides. Inhaling these seems to boost a type of white blood cell that attacks tumors and viruses. (People living in heavily forested areas of Japan have lower rates of mortality from several types of cancer.) His findings have contributed to a national pastime known as forest bathing: Millions of Japanese walk along 48 Forest Therapy trails annually country’s notoriously crowded cities. Researchers have also flagged another inhaled substance, the harmless soil microbe M. vaccae, which works as a natural Zoloft and stimulates the release of cytokines, which can in turn lead to the production of serotonin in the mood-regulating area of the brain.

I asked scientists what it takes to pull off such happy interventions and learned it’s not hard. Getting out into any park is fine, especially if spend time under trees, rather than in open fields, for maximum phytoncide intake. And slow down—preferably without being plugged into an iPod or a smartphone—so that all five senses can get their share (it’s OK to run your fingers through soil). “The effects are enhanced if you’re paying close attention to nature, immersing yourself,” says Ryan. So get out, explore, and enjoy.

Source: Prevention.com
Healthy Cooking: Chopped Greek Salad

Ingredients:
For the salad
1 (15 oz.) can of chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
1 green bell pepper, chopped
1/4 cup diced red onion
1 cup halved grape tomatoes
1/3 cup pitted kalamata olives
1 medium cucumber, sliced and quartered
4 oz. feta cheese, crumbled

For the dressing
2 tbsp. olive oil
2 tbsp. lemon juice
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tsp dried oregano
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:
1. Put all salad ingredients in a large bowl, and toss to combine.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, and oregano. Pour onto salad, and toss again. Taste, and add salt and pepper as needed.
3. Place salad in fridge for one hour to marinate, or serve immediately. Salad is best enjoyed 2-3 days after making.

Educational Corner: 3 Tips to Prevent Skin Cancer

As temperatures warm up this spring and we spend more time outdoors, simple daily habits can help protect your skin from cancer. Decisions on whether you wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen or choose to sit in the shade all make a difference in how much you expose your skin to ultraviolet light – a risk factor for skin cancer. It doesn’t matter what color your skin is or whether you never get a sunburn. Skin cancer can affect anyone.

The good news is that it’s never too late to start protecting your skin. Once you get into the habit of wearing sunscreen and seeking shade, it becomes second nature.

Wear sunscreen.
Choosing the right sunscreen can help you lower your risk of skin cancer. Make sure your sunscreen offers broad-spectrum protection against UVA and UVB rays. Select a water-resistant sunscreen that has a sun protection factor of 15 or higher. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before you go outdoors. You should reapply sunscreen about every two hours or sooner if you go swimming or are sweating. Remember, a higher SPF does not mean it provides longer protection.

Avoid indoor tanning.
Embrace your skin’s natural color. Don’t use tanning beds because they increase your risk for skin cancer. Using an indoor tanning bed before age 35 can increase your risk for melanoma by 59 percent, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. It doesn’t matter if you don’t get sunburns either. Indoor tanning will still raise your risk of melanoma, research shows. Women younger than 30 are six times more likely to develop melanoma if they tan indoors.

Cover up, seek shade.
If it seems like you always get sunburned in the late spring or early summer, it’s because UV rays from sunlight are the greatest during this time. As a general rule, the hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. are the most hazardous for UV exposure outdoors in the United States. One of the easiest ways to protect your skin is to wear a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, long sleeves and pants and seek the shade.

Source: Bon Secours
Let’s Hydrate!

**The Importance of Hydration**

**Facts and Tips for Staying Hydrated**

**Fact:** If you feel thirsty you are already dehydrated. Staying hydrated has multiple benefits, including energy, improved digestion, help fight against UTIs, and reduce dry skin.

The body is made up of approximately 3/4 of water.

- **Blood** = 93%
- **Muscle** = 73%
- **Body Fat** = 10%

**Recommended Water Intake** (per day):
- **Males:** 2 litres/68 ounces
- **Females:** 1.6 litres/55 ounces

Increase totals based on heat, sweat, activity.

**Sources of Water for Daily Hydration**

- **Sports Drinks**
  - Carbohydrates for energy
  - Sodium and potassium to replace lost minerals from sweat
- **Food**
  - Lettuce = 96% water
  - Tomato = 95% water
  - Broccoli = 89% water
  - Oatmeal = 84% water

**Tip:** Hydrate before, during, and after exercise or physical activity to avoid dehydration.

**Symptoms of Dehydration**

- **Muscle Cramps**
- **Headache**
- **Thirst**
- **Tiredness**
- **Chills**
- **Dizziness**
- **Nausea**

**Fact:** The body produces approximately 2 cups of water per day (8 oz./250 mL).
Summer is a great time to load up on your fresh fruits and vegetables. There are so many fruits and vegetables that are in season and that you can buy locally. Some summer fruits and vegetables are asparagus, green beans, blackberries, blueberries, strawberries, cucumbers, peaches, tomatoes, watermelon and squash. Each of these fruits and vegetables contain valuable health benefits. Below are just a few...

**Asparagus** - Asparagus is a good source of folate, vitamin K and fiber, among other nutrients.

**Green beans** - Green beans are a great source of vitamin K, which helps blood clot.

**Peaches** - A sweet and juicy summer staple that are rich in vitamin A, which supports your eyes, immune and skin health.

**Watermelon** - A barbecue favorite that is rich in potassium and water and will keep you hydrated all summer long.

**Berries** - Summer berries, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, come in a variety of colors and offer many health benefits. Strawberries have fiber, vitamin C and antioxidants which may help protect the nervous system and blood vessels. Blueberries are rich in vitamin C, vitamin K and manganese and have been found to possibly prevent prostate cancer and protect against heart disease. Raspberries are an excellent source of vitamin C and a good source of fiber, phosphorus and selenium. Raspberries also contain phytochemicals that have been found to help slow cancer growth.

**Cucumbers** - Cucumbers are a great source of magnesium, which, along with phosphorus, is required for bone mineral metabolism.

**Zucchini** - One of the many summer squashes, zucchini is a good source of phosphorus, which helps support bone health.

**Tomatoes** - Tomatoes are a summer staple and are a good source of lycopene, vitamin A, potassium and vitamin K.

Visit your local farmers market or grocery store and pick up some of these summer favorites. Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables to reap some of these health benefits.