



Nature-based therapy in disease prevention

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Rapid changes in the world, technostress and the use of artificial elements as part of modern lifestyles are alienating people from nature, which is known to be an antidote to stress. It is predicted that by 2050, almost 70% of the population will live in urban areas. Furthermore, stress-related illnesses are now responsible for 75% of all visits to the physicians.

Our intuitive tendency to seek a connection with nature confirms this inseparable relationship between humans and nature. Research has shown that psychiatric diagnoses are more common in urban areas than in rural areas, and spending time in nature during childhood has been shown to reduce the risk of mental disorders later in life. In particular, the presence of green and blue spaces close to home has been shown to reduce the incidence of mental illness later in life. Research also shows that children whose parents or guardians have a stronger connection to nature are also more nature-friendly in the future. People who are more connected to nature have a stronger desire and will to participate in environmentally friendly behaviors such as recycling or buying seasonal food. Likewise, people tend to be happier when they are close to nature.

Spending time in nature also has a positive effect on mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety, anger, confusion, vitality and rage, lowers heart rate and blood pressure, and ultimately reduces the risk of cardiovascular and chronic diseases. Nature has also been linked to improved cognitive function, brain and body activity, as well as improved mood and sleep.

It is our personal experience of what we define as nature. Green spaces, wild plants and animals, landscapes, ecosystems, waterscapes or perhaps birdsong, growing



herbs in the kitchen or sitting in the garden can convey „closeness to nature" to us in an individual way that we want to experience it.

Nature therapy and forest-based interventions such as forest bathing, urban green corridors and outdoor activities could have a positive impact on wellbeing, both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, as well as valuable interdisciplinary health outcomes such as alleviation, empowerment and restoration, leading to complete physical, mental and social health for the individual.

Forest bathing or „Shinrin-yoku" for example as a Japanese practice in which we experience the forest atmosphere with all our senses, is a remedy for urban stress. This kind of practice has also been shown to reduce insomnia in women.

To experience emotional well-being and good mental health, we need to balance three dimensions: Threat, drive and satisfaction due to different feelings and motivations. Each emotion releases certain hormones and for better resilience we need to balance our moods. Therapeutic solutions such as green social prescriptions of nature-based interventions and activities could help people to choose such a path of recovery, considering that people like to rely on physicians' recommendations.

We all need nature for our existence. It teaches us to slow down our fast-paced world and appreciate the little things in life. To make a difference and keep health in balance, people should appreciate their surroundings more and use them for their well-being. We are all part of nature. If we work against nature, we work against ourselves. Living in harmony with nature is the only thing that gives us hope for a better future. And it is worth fighting for.

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