

Recovery and Nature

If you are recovering from problematic drug or alcohol use, adding outdoor time to your to-do list could improve your physical, emotional and mental health & wellbeing and may help you to find new meaning and satisfaction in your life.

Benefits can include:

- **Reduced cravings** - Being able to see green spaces from your home is associated with reduced cravings for alcohol, cigarettes and harmful foods. A study, led by the University of Plymouth, showed that the reduced cravings occurred irrespective of physical activity level.
- **Improved sleep** - A good night's sleep is a key factor in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Too much time indoors under artificial light, especially the harmful blue light from TVs and computer screens, can be enough to disrupt a person's sleep pattern. Exposure to natural sunlight, can help to right your natural circadian rhythm. It will also help to boost levels of vitamin D in your body which help to maintain a healthy immune system. You should sleep better and have more energy to do the things you enjoy.
- **Feeling fitter** - Getting moving will help to improve your circulation, lower risk of diabetes and cardiac disease and assist with weight management. Exercising in natural environments - compared to exercising indoors - is associated with greater feelings of revitalisation, and a greater intention to repeat the activity.
- **Finding new interests** - According to Psychology Today, one of the biggest threats to a successful recovery is boredom. Finding a hobby can give you an outlet for stress and create a sense of purpose. An outdoor activity, like hiking, gardening, or nature photography is a great way to combat boredom this gain a new hobby or skill.
- **Improved mental health** - Research has found that walking outside regularly can reduce the severity of depression. Being in nature also reduces feelings of stress, anger and anxiety; Exercise has been shown to be as effective at combating depression as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychotropic medications. Aerobic exercise may confer significant benefit in the treatment of adults with anxiety problems including anxiety sensitivity, panic disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder.
- **Making new friends** - Young people who are involved with organised sports and/or physical activity benefit from learning social skills, building peer relationships, and developing a peer group that is typically more resilient (Smith 2002). Whether it is peer support or whether you are looking to make new social connections away from bad influences, there are many activities in nature that can build long lasting social connections and friendships. Outdoor volunteering is a great way to meet like-minded people and give back to your community through practical projects.

Spending time in nature can be as simple as sitting outside in your backyard or going for a walk around your neighbourhood. Most of us have some green space near to our homes and connecting with nature doesn't need to cost anything. Scheduling a little outdoor time into your daily routine can do wonders for your health and wellbeing.

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