

Cultural Daily

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Charles Joseph Popov on the Positive Effects Nature has on Our Psyche and Mental Health

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Most of us have an idea that taking a walk outside is good for us. In doing so, we get a break from the rush of our daily lives, we enjoy the beauty and peace of being in a natural setting and we are able to move our bodies in the process. Now more than ever though, beyond the tertiary feelings of doing good for ourselves, research is showing that being in nature has real, quantifiable mental and physical health benefits. What you are seeing, hearing, experiencing at any moment is changing not only your mood, but how your nervous, endocrine, and immune systems are all working.

Charles Popov, the founder of Resiliency BHS and Geographia based out of Georgia, is also a counselor by trade with specialties in health, nutrition, psychology and resilience therapy. In his practice, Popov has often cited the research behind nature's benefits, which reveals that our chosen environments can increase or reduce stress, which in turn impacts our bodies. He outlines how nature can positively impact our psyche, hormones, blood pressure, and mental health. He notes: "I cannot emphasize the enormous benefits that nature provides. I personally have a greenhouse, hydroponic and aquaponic grow stations, a small fish pond, and several flowing fountains at my home. Additionally, I grow things from seeds, nurture them through the seedling process, and replant them. I eat what can be eaten, and admire what cannot be eaten (i.e., beautiful flowers and plants). I have little bird feeders that bring in all kinds of colorful birds. I plant hummingbird and butterfly flowers. Of course, we have parks and nature preserves, but you can also create the benefits of nature in your own home. Researchers are amassing a body of evidence, proving what we all know to be true: nature is good for us and has both long and short term mental and physical health benefits."

Effects of Nature on Negative Emotions

There is a strong connection between time spent in nature and reduced negative emotions. This includes symptoms of anxiety and depression as well as afflictions like irritability, insomnia, tension headaches, and indigestion. Where the stress of an unpleasant environment can cause an individual to feel anxious, sad, or helpless, which in turn elevates blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and suppresses the immune system, a pleasing environment does just the opposite.

Health Benefits

Just some of the aids of outdoor time that [specialists like Charles Joseph Popov](#) have observed include: its general boosting of the immune system, the lowering of blood pressure, reduction of

stress, mood improvements, the increase of one's ability to focus (even in children with ADHD), the accelerated recovery from surgery or illness, energy level surges, and last but not least, the overall improvement of sleep.

Numerous scientific theorems have established that the exposure to nature boosts our immune system, but, what has been noted in greater specifics, is that when we breathe in fresh air, we also breathe in phytoncides, airborne chemicals that plants give off to protect themselves from insects. Phytoncides have antibacterial and antifungal qualities which help plants fight disease. When people breathe in these chemicals, our bodies respond by increasing the number and activity of a type of white blood cell called "natural killer cells," which destroy tumors and virus-infected cells within our bodies.

Additionally, the view that spending time in the wilderness reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and improves mood is backed up by numerous studies that confirm that both exercising and simply sitting and looking at nature reduces the stress-related hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Studies examining the same activities in urban areas showed no reduction of stress-related effects and because stress inhibits the immune system at large, the stress-reduction properties of being in the outdoors are further magnified.

Authorities like Charles Popov have also noted that spending time in nature helps you focus. Our lives are busier than ever with jobs, school, and family life. Trying to focus on many activities or even a single thing for long periods of time can mentally drain us given the way our brains have been trained by modern-day media, a phenomenon called "directed attention fatigue." Spending time in nature gives the cognitive portion of our brain a break, allowing us to focus better and renew our ability to be patient.

Charles Joseph Popov's Concluding Thoughts

As a result of this evidence, many counselors will advise their patients to try and move their workouts into the outdoors. Regular use of natural areas for physical activity can reduce the risk of mental health problems, not to mention its bolstering of general health.

However, if the trappings of your day-to-day life make being outside more difficult than you would like, start small, suggests Charles Popov. Even five minutes outside in green spaces is said to have a positive effect on one's well being. Think of it as a prescription with no negative side effects that is also free.

Photo:  Qingbao Meng

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