

The Benefits of Nature and Outdoors

When your family is so very busy, spending time outside can seem like a luxury. However, research shows that time in green areas is important to overall health and well-being of children as well as adults.



Children have always learned by being curious and asking questions. One of the things families can do is take young children outside and let them explore nature. They are often fascinated by water, sand, mud, rain, clouds, plants, etc.

A University of Illinois scientist has found that children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) benefit from being outdoors in green environments. After spending time in green space outdoors, children with ADHD are much more ready to learn and focus when they return to an inside setting as compared to those spending time indoors or in outdoor non-green environments. Parents or caregivers who allow children some time outdoors after school in a grassy yard or tree-lined park might be making it easier for them to focus on homework later.

Researchers have also found links between early experiences with the natural world and development of a child's imagination. Imaginary play is an important factor in a child's healthy social and psychological development. In addition, pleasurable outdoor experiences have been found to contribute to recall skills, creative problem-solving and creativity in children.

Why is outdoors better than a gym? Children (and adults) benefit from being in the sunshine. Being able to see nature

refreshes and calms a child and reduces stress. Many schools have shortened recess and physical education classes and children are not as active as they need to be. This decrease in activity for children may be showing up in later lifestyle patterns of inactivity which reduces overall physical and psychological health.

What can you do?

- ❖ Schedule some family time each week to enjoy the outdoors.
- ❖ Make this an important family routine and commit to it.
- ❖ Use the time to encourage your child to be outdoors and explore the environment.
- ❖ Demonstrate to your child ways to observe nature - talk about how the seasons change, make comments about the types of flowers, colors, and beauty you observe.

Take time to incorporate more outdoor activity into your family life.

Make family vacations more outdoor oriented.

- ❖ Consider taking active vacations where you go bike riding, snowboarding, or hiking as the main theme of the vacation.
- ❖ Discuss ideas for outdoor activities with your family. Decide what actions you might take to use the outdoors, be more active, and learn about fun things to try. Everyone will feel better.

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