

Aging well in Athens and surrounding communities

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Stress Rx: Two hours in nature/week



As many of us discovered through shelter-in-place restrictions, spending time outdoors isn't just "nice." It feels fundamentally *healing*.

The research backs this up. Time spent in nature has been documented to decrease cortisol—a stress hormone—and boost the immune system. It can reduce depression and improve attention. The studies are so

compelling that before the pandemic, some doctors were writing prescriptions for a weekly outing! If you are feeling stressed, consider a little nature therapy.

How does it work? Researchers aren't exactly sure. Some believe it's the physical activity that usually accompanies time in nature. Walking, for instance. Some suggest it is exposure to better air quality, because plants process and filter out pollutants. (But be wary of pollens if you have allergies. And of course, practice social distancing and have a mask at the ready, per current advice of local health officials.)

Overall, it seems that focused *awareness* of nature, separate from one's daily concerns, provides the most universal benefit: Stress reduction *and* mood enhancement.

Forest bathing. A Japanese activity called "forest bathing" is particularly effective and was gaining popularity in the United States before COVID-19. In essence, it's a guided trip through a forest. In silence. Instead of talking, participants pay attention to sights, smells, and sounds. They are encouraged to breathe deeply and sometimes just sit still. They may also be guided through muscle relaxation techniques.

You can try this on your own, without a guide. Consciously take a break from your worries. Focus on each of your senses, one at a time. "What are the smells I am smelling?" Breathe deep and observe. "What are the sounds around me?" Quell your inner voice so you can hear the voice of nature. "How does the light dance between the leaves of the trees?" Focus on what you see in a new way.

Accessible nature. It turns out that you don't need to go to the wilderness. A safe neighborhood park is also beneficial. A stream or pond is an extra plus. And you don't have to spend all day. Two hours of time each week, even added up over several short sessions, provide the same benefits as spending five hours.

**Are the restrictions on older adults getting you down?
Let us help you strategize for safety AND quality of life.
Give us a call at 706-810-3203.**



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From housing to medical care, we a•bridge the confusing tangle of elder care services and help you develop a plan tailored to your unique priorities and resources.

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