



The Green Sanctuary Ministry Team Says: Go Take a Hike!

"Forest Bathing" – or *Shinrin-yoku* in Japanese – is the new trend in reducing stress and depression, lowering blood pressure, boosting immunity, and improving overall mental and physical health. For those unacquainted with the term, it essentially means taking a quiet, leisurely, mindful walk in the woods. No water is involved; just soaking up the forest "atmosphere." That this type of activity would be good for both the mind and body should

come as no surprise. People have been extolling the benefits of spending time in nature for centuries and modern studies just keep confirming it.

Unfortunately, we spend most of our time indoors. A key figure in a 2001 study entitled The National Human Activity Pattern Survey (NHAPS) is that Americans spend 87% of their time indoors and an additional 6% in an enclosed vehicle (on average). That doesn't leave much time for taking a relaxing soak in the forest.

At some level, we all intuitively know that the increasing use of computers, smart phones, televisions, and other technology, is pulling many of us away from the natural world. "It is increasingly normal to spend little time outside," the NHAPS report notes. The fact that we are basically an indoor species has only been exacerbated by COVID-19. But if ever there was a need to unplug from technology, slow down, and de-stress, it's been this past year.

The good news, as reported in a 2019 scientific report, is that spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. Two hours a week is certainly doable, and there are many local options including those in our own town like Ewing Woods (right behind the church!), Harold King Forest off Nichols Road), or the recently opened Forest River Conservation Area Connector (behind the Swampscott Cemetery by the new dog park).

The Green Sanctuary Ministry Team invites you and your family to go take a hike and share photos of your adventure with the congregation. Send photos to tbandrowicz@gmail.com and they'll be posted in the Weekly Update.

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