



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Family Matters

Improving Health Together

April 2024 Newsletter

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Getting Outside Can Improve Health and Feelings of Wellbeing

By Calandra Lindstadt, Rural Health Specialist, Western Region

Both adults and children can benefit from spending time outside in nature. On average, Americans spend around 90% of their day indoors. Some studies estimate we spend more than 10 hours per day on average staring at screens.



Potential health benefits of spending time outside:

- Reduced risk of obesity, asthma, and stress in children
- Reduced risk of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and stress in adults

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks." John Muir



Nature deficit disorder is a concept coined by Richard Louv to describe the importance of connecting with nature for human wellbeing. His book *Last Child in the Woods* brings attention to the value of exposing kids to nature. It offers practical ideas on how to get families outside. There is a growing "Leave No Child Inside" movement amongst parents who value the act of getting kids outside more often. Luckily, it turns out the prescription for a Vitamin N (Nature) deficiency isn't out of reach. Just 20 minutes per day (around 2 hours per week) can make a difference. Researchers have found when we connect with nature, it can promote holistic well-being. Additionally, it increases our appreciation for nature.

Tips for success:

- **Schedule regular outdoor time:** Set aside dedicated time each day or week to spend outdoors. Whether it's going for a walk in the park, gardening, or simply sitting in a natural setting, get outside.
- **Practice mindfulness in nature:** Take time to engage all five senses while outdoors. Notice the sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes of the natural environment.
- **Explore local green spaces:** Take advantage of nearby parks, trails, and greenways for outdoor recreation and relaxation.
- **Involve the whole family:** Make outdoor activities a family affair. Plan nature outings, picnics, or camping trips together.
- **Limit screen time:** Encourage outdoor play and exploration. Help children develop a deeper connection with nature.



Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

Explain to children that being outside for at least 20 minutes a day could help them be healthier and feel less stress. Tell them you want to try an experiment these next few weeks. You want them to go outside with you to enjoy nature about 20 minutes each day for 2 weeks. At the end of 2 weeks, have a family discussion about the experiment. Do they feel better, healthier, etc.?

When outside with children:

- **Focus on fun, not competition:** Emphasize the importance of having fun, trying their best, and being active for the joy of movement.
- **Help children engage their senses while spending time in nature:** Encourage them to listen for bird songs or feel the texture of tree bark. Ask them to notice the smell of flowers and observe the colors and patterns they see in plants or rocks.
- **Introduce “Leave No Trace” principles:** Remind them to pack out trash, stay on designated trails, and respect wildlife. Be a positive role model and encourage children to take an active role in conservation, such as picking up litter in your neighborhood park.



Activity for Health:

Nature Scavenger Hunt:

- Take a walk-in a nearby park or nature reserve with your family.
- Create a list of items to find in nature, such as different types of leaves, rocks, flowers, or animal tracks.
- Encourage children to explore and observe their surroundings while searching for items on the list..
- This is a great opportunity to talk about how to enjoy nature while “leaving no trace”. Emphasize the importance of caring for our natural surroundings by not leaving trash or disturbing nature.
- After the scavenger hunt, discuss the findings and share experiences from the outdoor adventure.

NATURE WALK SCAVENGER HUNT



If you are reading this newsletter in print version, information about the book *Last Child in the Woods* can be found at this QR Code

