

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Take Your Stress For A Walk In The Woods

from the American Counseling Association

Yes, today's world is a very hectic place. Our cities and towns are crowded with more people and traffic. Constantly-changing technology is always seeking our attention, and daily living has become more stressful. We are over-stimulated and often overwhelmed.

Most of us have learned to cope with our busy lives, but there is a price we are paying for the almost constant stress we face. We may appear to ignore a lot of the stimulation coming at us each day, but doing so takes almost constant unconscious effort. Studies have found that stressful environments can lead to anxiety and depression, and may also be at least part of the reason for headaches, drinking problems, and various other serious health issues.

So how do we deal with a world that is constantly making demands upon us? The simplest answer, according to many experts, is simply to get away from it all, even if just for a short time. While most of us don't want to move to some remote cabin, experts advise adding just a little nature to our daily lives can make an important difference.

Studies find that even small, simple changes help reduce stress. People who have worked in an office with no windows or just a view of a blank wall, report finding their work environment much more pleasant if they are able to look out and simply see a tree or two.

Something as easy as adding a potted plant or two to the area where you spend a good part of your day can also help reduce daily stress.

The biggest benefit appears to come from actually getting outdoors and into nature. Yes, a walk in the woods really can help sooth you and give you a break from a busy life. But there are also benefits from just taking a lunch time stroll through a nearby park or down a tree-lined street.

This time with nature isn't an opportunity to worry about the day's problems or upcoming issues, but rather a chance to actually listen to the quiet of nature, to admire the beauty of an old tree, or just to smile at those squirrels chasing one another.

No, a walk in the woods is not going to be a miracle cure for all of life's stresses, but it does give your mind a chance to relax and regroup, and that's a positive thing.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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