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ON THE BORDER

Info & insights from the interface between energy healing & science



August 2018

Welcome to the August 2018 edition of 'On the Border'.

Following the Couch Potato article last month, this month we're heading in the other direction: to the great outdoors. **What happens when we exercise (=move) outside in Nature?**

The **Freebie** this month is one you will not want to miss and especially if you've any dealings with **cancer**. Maybe you have (or have had) cancer yourself, a dear person in your life is currently dealing with this disease or you are a therapist with clients struggling with all the aspects cancer brings into their lives.

Thank you for all your enthusiastic feedback about my new website! So far the **chakra assessment** is proving popular: its **accuracy** and **insights** seem to be much **appreciated**. Also I've heard that you really like being able to **schedule an appointment online** instead of having to email backwards and forwards. Not checked out the new website yet? Then you're welcome to surf along to <https://www.jaynejubb.com>.

For those of you new to 'On the Border', this is Jayne's monthly Ezine newsletter about the latest information and insights into energy fields, healing and science. Each month I share with you some of the latest research and how it applies to healing, energy work & (daily) life. There is also a 'Freebie' section where you get something for nothing, gratis.

The Green Machine: What Exercising in Nature Does For You

With the heat wave during the last month I was more in couch potato mode, but when the cooler days in between hit I was looking for any excuse to get outside and moving. Forgot to buy bananas? I was volunteering to jump on the bike to go



to the supermarket. A couple of hours between clients? Let me head out over the dike at the back of our house and into the green fields. Fresh (cooler) air, Nature, movement!

I've often noticed how people who are outdoors just seem to generally be happier and smilier. Observing this got me wondering about the direct and indirect effect of simply being outdoors—in the sunshine, flanked by Mother Nature—how much happier these folks appear compared to the determined and somewhat miserable faces I see when cycling past the gyms in the area around our house. Not only did this setting make me grateful to live where I do but it also inspired me to dig into some research on how green spaces and exercise can have a synergistic effect on us humans.

Our Historic Relationship with Nature

Our hunter-gatherer ancestors co-existed with the outdoor natural environment for tens of thousands of years. In his book *Biophilia*, Edward Wilson hypothesised that this provides us present-day humans with our innate desire to be in and around nature. All we really need to do is leave the city (or perhaps fly to a part of the world where being outside is the default rather than the exception) to see this in action.

A number of the papers and studies I came across said that in addition to satisfying this primal instinct, nature also provides an environment that does not require our direct attention (a tree doesn't have any notification beeps), giving the great outdoors some wonderful restorative properties that encourage our recovery from mental fatigue and attention restoration.

Although in urban settings fewer and fewer people are getting involved in the natural environment on a daily basis, many people do seek out green spaces and get involved in outdoor activities. Currently, there is an increasing trend of fit folks signing up for outdoor endurance challenges like obstacle course races, cross-country runs, and mountain bike events (but not in The Netherlands which is very flat...), but paradoxically, there is an even greater number of sedentary people who are simply getting insufficient physical activity to meet even our meager current health guidelines.

Green Exercise

Recent reviews indicate that getting out and exercising outdoors appears to be a lot more beneficial to mental health over the same indoor activities, and natural environments have a greater impact on psychological health, especially when an element of play and having fun is involved. So much so that a term 'green exercise' was adopted to describe the health benefit that happens when we exercise in nature. The term was adopted in 2003 and then published through peer-review in 2005.

In that 2005 paper, five groups of 20 participants were shown a sequence of 30 scenes projected on a wall while they exercised on a treadmill. This sounds a little ridiculous and boring but please hang in there, the findings are cool.

Four categories of scenes were shown to the treadmill-bound participants: rural pleasant, rural unpleasant, urban pleasant, and urban unpleasant. There was also a control group who was running on a treadmill while staring at a blank wall. No rural or urban photos for them.

For the test, blood pressure and the psychological measures of self-esteem and mood were measured before and after the intervention. In the end, there was a clear effect of both exercise and the different scenes on the participant's blood pressure, self-esteem, and mood.

- **Exercise alone significantly reduced blood pressure, increased self-esteem, and had a positive significant effect on mood measures (chalk one up for exercise!)**
- **Pleasant rural and urban scenes produced a significantly greater positive effect on self-esteem than the exercise alone group (showing the synergistic effect of green exercise in both rural and urban environments).**
- **But, by contrast, unpleasant rural and urban scenes reduced the positive effects of exercise on self-esteem.**
- **And finally, the unpleasant rural scenes had the most dramatic effect, depressing the beneficial effects of exercise on three different measures of mood.**

The researchers interpreted that final result as threats to the countryside have a greater negative effect on mood than the areas that were already urban and already unpleasant. This led the researchers to conclude that “green exercise has both important public and environmental health consequences.”

Living in Rural vs. Urban Areas

According to the 2010 census from the U.S. Census Bureau, 80.7% of the U.S. population lives in urban areas. This is an increase from 79% in 2000. Similarly, in the UK, more than 80% of people live in urban areas (2004), though there has been greater growth in rural areas in the past few years.

Urban settings, simply by definition, have less nature than rural ones (although many large cities are making a greater effort to include more green space). But still, according to research and anecdotal evidence alike, less green space means we may have reduced mental well-being and less opportunity to recover from mental stress.

The World Health Organisation estimates that depression and depression-related illness is poised to be the greatest cause of ill-health by 2020. This is due in part to some other unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking, overeating, and alcohol consumption, which they believe are coping mechanisms for both mental ill-health and general stress but also come with their own unhealthy consequences.

Nature and Psychological Well-being

A study called The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise was done to explore the synergy between adopting physical activities while also

being directly exposed to nature. In that study, they found that both physical activity and nature can positively affect physical and psychological well-being.

The researchers broke nature exposure into three levels of engagement with increasing benefits at each level. Those levels are:

- 1. Viewing nature: as through a window, or in a painting.**
- 2. Being in the presence of nearby nature: which may be incidental to some other activity, such as walking or cycling to work, reading on a garden seat, or talking to friends in a park.**
- 3. Active participation and involvement with nature: such as gardening, farming, trekking, camping, cross-country running, or horse-riding.**

That study concluded that there is evidence that indicates nature can make positive contributions to our health, it can also help us recover from pre-existing stresses or problems. The coolest part, in my opinion, is that exposure to nature can have an “immunising effect” that will then protect us from future stresses, and can help us concentrate and think more clearly.

Nature and Chronic Pain

In a different type of study called *Patient's perceptions of Green Exercise*, in the setting of chronic pain they found that 47% of people, ages 50–70 years, had some type of chronic pain. Of those respondents, the most frequent pain complaint was back pain (65%). But 95% of those participants reported that nature improved their mood and reduced their chronic pain symptoms.

There was a hurdle in this study, though. A hurdle that likely faces many of us city dwellers. Only 75% of the study participants reported that green spaces were easily accessible to them on a regular basis. That leaves 25% of them in need of an alternative treatment.

Not Just Playtime

For those of you who think you can only get serious fitness results from working out in a formal gym setting, there is a study that looked at the affective outcomes during and after high-intensity exercise in outdoor green and indoor gym settings. This study compared the psychological effects of high-intensity exercise in outdoor green and indoor gym settings in 22 adult runners using a randomised repeated measures design.

Affect and perceived exertion were assessed before, during, and after a 6000 metre run. The runners were told to run the second half of the distance at maximum effort. After doing the same run outside and again in the gym, the physiological outcomes did not differ at any point between the settings.

This study suggests that runners experience the same positive affective responses to high-intensity exercise in both a natural outdoor environment and an indoor gym. And I probably don't have to make you do this same test on yourself to know which setting you would enjoy more, do I?

The Problem

The general decline in physical activity worldwide is resulting in a huge increase in physical disability, disease, and a rising number of cases of mental ill-health. So, it is essential that we find ways to encourage everyone to get more movement into their lives on a daily basis.

This idea is not new. For 99% of our existence on this planet, not only have we “lived off the land” and relied on nature for our basic survival and health, but we have also used it for pleasure and fun. More recently rock climbers, hikers, mountain bikers, and endurance athletes of all types have used the great outdoors and green spaces for their chosen sport. They have found that being outside not only increases their enjoyment but also improves their adherence to a fitness program. Now we are finding that it may also encourage positive physical activity behaviours which are likely to produce greater health gains.

One hypothesis is that we humans are born with an emotional connection to other living organisms, which may mean that part of our genetic makeup is innately predisposed to desire contact with nature. This would explain why green exercise is so effective at facilitating physical activity that also improves health. Because it can:

- **Increase physical activity levels with lower levels of perceived exertion.**
- **Reduce stress.**
- **Remove mental fatigue.**
- **Improve mood and self-esteem.**

So, the quick and dirty tip in all of this is that exercise within green spaces and the great outdoors has the potential to help us address health challenges facing us city dwellers and should not be just looked at as a playground for those who seek the thrills of extreme sports, but rather as a location that can be visited by all of us.

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