

HEALTH

Education

Take Your Workout Outdoors: Importance and Benefits

Oftentimes, we think of exercising as being confined to a treadmill or strength machines in a gym, but that does not always have to be the case. Alternate your gym workouts with the fitness playground of the great outdoors. This can have a number of benefits, ranging from physical to mental wellbeing. Moreover, there are a variety of factors that go into the success of our exercise routines, which can be improved by heading out the door!

Motivation

First and foremost, exercising outdoors can be fun and motivating. A warm, sunny day can make us want to be outside longer, giving us a push to extend that workout more than we may have indoors.

When you are on a treadmill, you can stop it at any point and head right for the door. This is great when you're on a tight schedule. On the other hand, if you have time to take your run or walk out to a trail, at the furthest point from where you started, your only option is to go back.

Physicality

The surface of a treadmill will always be the same. If you opt for running outdoors, your terrain will vary as you go from the sidewalk to the street, or possibly to dirt or grass. These changes can be more physically demanding and will teach you how to adjust to differing surfaces.

Studies have also found that we stride differently when running outside, meaning we may work muscles in ways we typically do not while on a treadmill.

Social Benefits

Exercising outdoors is best when done in pairs or with a group. Recruit friends or family members to join you on a walk, jog, or playing catch in the park. This promotes safety and social engagement as you're forced to unplug those earbuds and tune in to what's happening with those who are most important in your life.

Mental Wellbeing

A study found that the majority of participants felt some improvements in their mental wellbeing when exercising outside as opposed to limiting all workouts indoors. This ranges from increased feelings of energy and revitalization to decreased feelings of confusion, anger, and depression.

Other studies have found that those who exercise outdoors have lower levels of cortisol in their blood, which relates to stress.

Sunlight & Vitamin D

An often overlooked benefit to exercising outdoors is the exposure to the sun (in moderation, of course). The sun is a great way to get vitamin D naturally, which also has a number of health benefits. Specifically, moderate levels of vitamin D have been linked to lower risk of heart disease, dementia, and even certain types of cancer.

It is still important to protect your skin with broad spectrum sunscreen to prevent burns and tissue damage. This is especially true if spending >10-15 minutes outdoors and during peak hours of the day 10am-4pm.

Free!

Maybe the most exciting benefit of exercising outdoors is that it is typically free. If there is a nearby park or a sidewalk in a safe area, try a new workout outside. If the park has stairs, benches, and a pull-up bar, you can get a full-body workout while enjoying all the other great benefits of being outside.

References:

<https://www.acefitness.org/education-and-resources/lifestyle/blog/5911/6-benefits-of-exercising-outdoors>
<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/es102947t>
<https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/21/the-benefits-of-exercising-outdoors/>
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/taking-too-much-vitamin-d-can-cloud-its-benefits-and-create-health-risks>



From Corporate Fitness Works Team Leader, Chris Piemonte