

The Upward Spiral Series



GREEN EXERCISE

A GUIDE TO GOING GREEN



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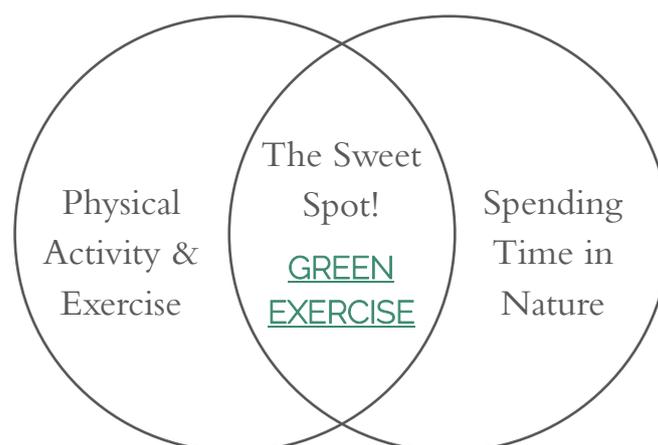


What is Green Exercise?

It's well known that exercise and physical activity are good for us! There is a mountain of evidence highlighting the benefits of an active lifestyle¹. There is also a substantial amount of research on the objective and subjective benefits of time spent in nature². Connecting with nature is, and always has been, a fundamental aspect of various cultures for as long we know. Think about the last time you retreated to a natural environment? How did it make you feel?

'Green Exercise' is the term used to describe the intersection of movement and nature and the synergistic health benefits that come about from being physically active in natural spaces³.

Of course this is not a new concept. People have been moving their bodies within natural environments since the beginning of time. But as our lives become increasingly sedentary and we spend more time in built environments, the research surrounding Green Exercise forms a compelling case for reconnecting with our roots as we move our bodies through beautiful spaces.





What are the Benefits?

Over the years, researchers have used three main techniques to determine the specific benefits of Green Exercise³. These include:

1. Exercising in built environments vs exercising in natural environments
2. Exercising indoors vs exercising outdoors
3. Accounting for the visual effect of the natural environment by replicating the exercise component in a laboratory setting with video footage of natural landscapes vs urban landscapes

The research studies show that exercising in a natural environment produces more positive outcomes than exercising in a built environment⁴. Also, exercising outdoors has more favourable outcomes than exercising indoors⁵. While any movement is likely to be beneficial, if Green Exercise is an option for you, it may provide some of the following benefits:

1. Reduced stress⁶
2. Reduced anxiety⁵
3. Reduced depression⁵
4. Reduced anger⁵
5. Reduced sadness⁷
6. Reduced perceived exertion of activity⁸
7. Increased self esteem⁹
8. Improved concentration and cognitive attention^{3,10}
9. Improved mood state¹¹
10. Increased likelihood of adhering to an exercise program¹²





Interesting Evidence!

A study involving 1890 participants found that being physically active in a natural environment, once per week, **halved the risk of poor mental health.**

Each additional bout of physical activity in a natural space reduced the risk by a further 6%.¹³





How to Go Green!

While the term ‘Green Exercise’ may evoke images of hiking through the mountains or meandering through a tropical rainforest, it can be as simple as a walk in a local park! Here are a few ideas for your next Green Exercise adventure:

1. Walk, run or cycle on a bush track
2. Take a hike through the mountains, forest or desert
3. Go on a photography walk, capturing images of beautiful flowers, plants and wildlife
4. Find a local botanical garden and go exploring
5. Grab a yoga mat and head to a beautiful outdoor space for a stretching session
6. Attend an outdoor group fitness or yoga session
7. Take a long walk along the beach (or lake!)
8. Try out a new aquatic activity such as kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding or surfing
9. Swim in an ocean, river or lake
10. Head to your local sporting field for a walk or run
11. Take your dog for a walk
12. Get busy in the garden

“Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt”

- John Muir





The Specifics

How Often?

At least once per week

The most significant benefits of Green Exercise are seen when adding one single session per week! Some research has shown that simply being active in a natural space, once per week, has protective mental health benefits that could halve your risk for poor mental health¹³. Of course, if you are able to, more frequent sessions will likely result in greater health gains.

What Intensity?

Light-Moderate

While lots of messages are encouraging us to exercise at a high intensity, when it comes to the mental health benefits of Green Exercise, light-moderate intensity is best¹⁴. The intensity of an activity will vary from person to person. A good way to ensure your exercise is of a light-moderate intensity, is to make sure you can comfortably maintain a conversation without feeling out of breath.

How Long?

As little as five minutes!

Green Exercise produces the most mental health benefits during the first five minutes of activity¹⁴. Of course, if you have the energy to move for longer, the health benefit is likely to be greater. However, it is good to know that time doesn't have to be a barrier if you don't have a whole day (or even hour) available to hike a mountain! A brief walk in a green space will still be beneficial!

What Type?

Something accessible, which you enjoy!

Take a look around you and establish what natural spaces are accessible. From there, pick a space you love...and be on your way!





Activity

Bring a sense of mindfulness to your Green Exercise using the following activity.

In the space around you...

What can you see?

What colours are around you? Are there trees, flowers, rocks, water? Can you see butterflies or bees? Can you see the horizon? What does the sky look like?

What can you hear?

Are there birds chirping? Can you hear leaves rustling in the wind? Can you hear water running?

What can you smell?

Can you smell wildflowers? Or the damp earth? What about fresh grass? Or rain?

What can you taste?

Can you taste the crisp air? Or the salt in the sea breeze?

What can you feel?

Can you feel the bark on the trees? What about the air on your skin, is it warm or cool? Is there snow you can touch? Or gumnuts you can pick up? What does the ground feel like beneath your feet?

How does it feel to be in this space?

What emotions does this space evoke? Do you feel calmer?

How does it feel to move your body through this space?

Can you feel your breathing getting faster as you move? Are you experiencing any pain? Or do you feel a sense of strength and freedom as you move your body? How does this feel compared to your movement patterns throughout a typical day?





More Information

If Green Exercise appeals to you but you need more information, get in touch!

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Until next time, enjoy and keep moving!

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