Nature Therapy or Just Fresh Air: Get Outside!

We feel nature's serenity and beauty, but science now explains why being outdoors makes our brains and bodies happy. For some in recovery, it can be a game changer

The ancient Greeks often built their temples of healing on remote islands and by the sea. Nineteenth-century sanatoriums for disease and mental health recuperation were nestled in the mountains, where the air was clean. Humans have understood the revitalizing power of being outside in nature ever since, well, we invented living *inside*.

We may have new [treatments](https://www.allsober.com/Treatment-Recovery/Find-Treatment) and technologies these days, but nature is still there, still powerful and still free. What does that have to do with [addiction recovery](https://www.allsober.com/Help-Information) and [mental health](https://www.allsober.com/details/navigating-mental-health-issues-in-recovery-part-of-journey)? Quite a lot, according to recent research! But you may have already figured that out.

The Power of Nature

You don't have to be a flower child or woo-woo enthusiast to understand that taking some time to romp in the wild (or the local park) just *feels better*.

But let's indulge in some talk about nature and its very real energies and restorative qualities. We evolved, after all, within and around nature, and we are still innately connected to this great and vast network of living, breathing things—even from our habitats of [cubicles](https://www.allsober.com/details/im-in-recovery-and-ready-to-work-what-do-i-need-to-know-sober-relaunch) and showers and overworked ACs.

For better or worse, most people no longer sleep outside or walk barefoot. Perhaps society has become increasingly disconnected from nature's simple and powerful [healing potential](https://www.allsober.com/Lifestyle/Health-Wellness). But that doesn't mean you have to be.

In fact, you should make a point of getting out in nature, for your mental and physical well-being. A Harvard Medical School professor recently pointed out that, in a study, "[levels of cortisol decreased](https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/can-forest-therapy-enhance-health-and-well-being-2020052919948) after a walk in the forest, compared with people who walked in a laboratory setting"; cortisol is the main hormone released during [stressful situations](https://www.allsober.com/details/how-to-tackle-stress-in-recovery-sober-lifestyle). Trees, the author wrote, give off powerful essential oils that can improve immunity and perhaps even alleviate [depression](https://www.allsober.com/details/seasonal-affective-disorder-in-recovery-how-to-overcome-sad-sober-help), [anxiety](https://www.allsober.com/details/is-it-normal-to-be-this-anxious-in-recovery-sober-help) and high blood pressure.

There are many ways to channel your inner adventurer and get access to this intriguing new health enhancer called "trees." And it's not just the trees. When life feels fast-paced and extreme, it can be easy to forget how peaceful nature can be. It's quiet and fresh out there. The solace nature offers can give you some space and mental clarity to [figure things out](https://www.allsober.com/details/getting-real-about-recovery-goals-sober-help).

Engaging with nature in any form can offer great healing benefits for your mind and body. Reminder: Nature is right outside. You don't have to be an outdoorsy person to access it. Let's consider the "how" and "why" of becoming more comfortable in the natural world.

Intrigued? Here's What Nature Therapy Means

Nature therapy has many names and, really, can be gained through almost any activity under the sky and sun. There are formal, structured versions of nature [therapy](https://www.allsober.com/Treatment-Recovery/Find-Counseling), but you can experience the benefits of nature however suits you best.

One interesting one that's been explored in environmental medicine in recent years involves taking in nature with all of your senses, specifically by standing barefoot or lying on the ground (in nature, of course). Connecting your physical body with the ground is called "earthing."

[A study](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3265077/) by a team of medical researchers and biologists explains how it works. "The earth's surface possesses a limitless and continuously renewed supply of free or mobile electrons." When you physically connect with the earth, your body absorbs the free electrons, helping you discharge the heaviness of stress and other inflammatory conditions of the mind and body.

Maybe you're not ready to go earthing, but all these scientists seem to be finding that [your mind and body sure do like nature](https://www.allsober.com/details/whats-a-wellness-program-and-how-can-it-charge-up-my-sobriety-sober-lifestyle)! Get out there and [do what feels best](https://www.allsober.com/details/sobriety-roundtable-whats-your-favorite-sober-activity-sober-lifestyle). Did we mention it's free?

OK, What Does Nature Therapy Have To Do With My Recovery?

Nature therapy can benefit your recovery process in many ways. A quick look at [some more recent studies](https://namica.org/blog/mental-health-benefits-of-nature/) confirms the real mental health benefits to maintaining a connection with the world around us and the peaceful balance that can be regained through interactions with nature.

Getting outdoors can benefit your recovery process by reducing stress—that's [a big one](https://www.allsober.com/details/how-to-tackle-stress-in-recovery-sober-lifestyle). Decreasing your exposure to stress can support the management of [co-occurring disorders](https://www.allsober.com/details/substance-use-and-mental-health-disorders-understanding-whats-going-on) or mental health challenges that you may be dealing with. Nature therapy also helps you develop healthy [coping skills](https://www.allsober.com/details/self-care-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important-in-recovery-sober-help) that make stress feel less intense.

The [clarity and peace](https://www.allsober.com/details/filling-the-void-in-recovery-through-spiritual-exploration-sober-lifestyle) that come from spending time in nature give you time and space away from the noise. When you're enriched by this environment, decision-making and action-taking become more [productive and intentional](https://www.allsober.com/details/5-paths-to-finding-your-purpose-in-recovery-sober-lifestyle). Rather than reacting to the impulses created by stress, you can more easily access your inner sense of peace as you cultivate it in tandem with the natural world.

As those trees suggested, there are other ways nature therapy can [improve your overall sense of well-being](https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/top-ways-to-reduce-daily-stress), too. Nature therapy can help you address:

* Physical needs: through [movement](https://www.allsober.com/details/exercise-in-recovery-why-should-you-sober-lifestyle), getting fresh air and taking in sunlight
* Emotional needs: through deep breathing and having space to process
* Mental needs: giving yourself a break from screens, harsh lights and other mental distractions

As you slow down and take in the world, you'll feel—or remember—how much of a gift nature can be for you.

Let's Go! How Do I Start?

Ah, there are so many ways to connect with nature! Although getting outdoors is [ideal for nature therapy](https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/10-ways-to-relax-in-nature-and-stress-less), it's even possible to experience the joys of the natural world indoors, which almost feels like cheating.

Some ways to reconnect with the earth:

* Gardening or tending to indoor plants
* [Taking a nature walk](https://www.allsober.com/details/one-step-at-a-time-take-a-walk-take-a-hike-sober-lifestyle), barefoot if possible
* Going to the beach
* [Creating art](https://www.allsober.com/details/the-power-of-creativity-on-mental-health-for-veterans-and-everyone-else-sober-help) outdoors
* Caring for a pet
* Listening to the birds sing
* Buying or picking flowers
* Climbing trees, if that's more your speed
* Playing outside, dancing in the rain, sitting in the sun and the list goes on

What do these have in common? Connecting with nature often provides a sense of stillness, making it easier for you to access your calm. Embracing that stillness and peace can also make it easier to enjoy the present moment. There's real freedom you can find in nature that's not so easy to access at work, at home or around other people.

Whether you are seeking to unwind or reenergize yourself, nature therapy—or simply fresh air—can help you relax the tensions that sometimes come with life in recovery and clean the lens through which you look at the world. Off you go!