



Ask the Expert with Dr. Darrell Menard

Find Answers to your Sport Medicine Questions!

What is Green Exercise?

Q: Prior to starting my new office job, I was quite inactive but I am now a true believer in the value of regular physical activity. Out of habit, I used to do most of my workouts in a gym but when these facilities closed during the pandemic I was forced to train outside. To my surprise, I much prefer exercising outside compared to my previous gym routine. Are there any real benefits to exercising outside? **Claude**

A: Dear Claude: Congratulations on discovering the joys of outdoor physical activity. 'Green exercise' as it is often referred to, is exercising in the great outdoors and has become quite popular during the COVID19 pandemic. Like yourself, many people find green exercise a welcome change from training indoors. The good news is that green exercise is not only enjoyable but it also offers many benefits over and above those you get from exercise alone. These benefits include:

- 1. Sensory stimulation:** Staring at a blank wall while walking on a treadmill gets old very quickly. On the other hand, doing the same walk in the forest offers an enormous amount of sensory stimulation including the smell of fresh air, the feel of the forest path, the sound of rustling leaves and bird calls, the sight of squirrels gathering nuts.
- 2. Saving time and money:** Walking out your door to exercise not only saves you time but it also saves you money on gas, wear and tear on your car, parking fees, gym memberships, etc.
- 3. Easy access and convenience:** You can exercise outdoors pretty much anytime and anywhere you want.
- 4. Safety:** While we continue to deal with the COVID19 pandemic, exercising outside remains the safest option.
- 5. Happy Hormones:** Exercising stimulates the body to release substances such as endorphins, dopamine and serotonin that help provide you with the "exerciser's high" many people experience during and after a workout. The good news is that training outside stimulates the greater release of these feel good chemicals.
- 6. Vitamin D:** This vitamin is important to your health, especially your bone health. Your body produces more vitamin D when it is regularly exposed to sunshine.
- 7. Greater calorie burn:** You burn more calories when you exercise outside. Wind resistance, hills, uneven surfaces and thermoregulation (hot or cold) all place extra calorie requirements on the body.
- 8. Staying connected:** Exercising outside can improve your social life – especially during the pandemic. Meeting other people and keeping up on what is going on in your community can help you feel more connected.
- 9. Providing inspiration:** Some people may be inspired to become more active seeing you exercising outside.
- 10. Better workout:** Research has shown that when people walk outside they tend to walk further, faster and feel they are working less intensely than those who exercise inside.

The bottom line: exercising outside basically allows you to "double down" on your benefits. Not only do you get the multitude of health and wellness benefits that come from exercising but you also get the many rewards that come from enjoying mother nature. So the next time you go to stationary cycle in your boring basement why not take your outdoor bike for a spin around the neighborhood – you just might have a lot more fun. **Exercise is a medicine that works even better when it is taken outside!**

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Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

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