

ELEVATE YOUR MOOD AND YOUR HEART RATE



by Chris Reabel

go OUTSIDE for a HIKE

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Spring is a great time to get outside for a hike and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine that we often lack in our Canadian winters. Studies in Canada have shown that spending time outside contributes to elevating our overall mood and decreases our stress levels, as much as twenty-thousand-dollar salary increase would.

Outdoor spaces, especially areas with lots of trees contain electronically charged particles when the air molecules come into contact with sunlight and water. As we engage in outdoor activities such as hiking, we become more alert, gain mental clarity and elevate our mood.

Measuring stress hormone behaviours when being active outdoors has showed:

- ▶ A decrease in cortisol (stress hormone)
- ▶ Generates higher level of endorphins (feel good hormones)
- ▶ Increases vitality and performance

- ▶ Decreases resting blood pressure
- ▶ And of course, gives us a natural boost of Vitamin D levels

Find an outdoor area, such as a trail with lots of trees, a park and an area with a tree and a piece of grass that you can use for a warm-up and a cool-down and stretch. In the Ottawa area, some of my favourite places to go are Hogsback Park, NCC trails and Gatineau Park.

Prior to any activity, it important to incorporate a proper full-body warm-up. The benefits of warming up are:

- ▶ Prepares you both mentally and physically for your activity (walking, hiking, running, etc.)
- ▶ Gradually gets your blood circulating through your body
- ▶ Increases oxygen flow to your body
- ▶ Progressively elevates your heart rate
- ▶ Helps prevent injuries or joint/muscle pain

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Gentle walking is a great way to warm-up especially prior to activities like hiking and running where there may be many variations of terrain (hills, slopes and rocky paths).

It is also just important at the end our outdoor activities that we properly recover and stretch. The major benefits of recovery are:

- ▶ To release any physical or mental tension associated with the activity
- ▶ An opportunity to lengthen our muscles and stretch
- ▶ To facilitate physical, mental and emotional equilibrium
- ▶ To prevent injuries and muscle soreness

A great way to recover is to decrease the speed/intensity of your activity followed by some key stretching exercises for the glutes, thighs, hips and ankles.

Even a fifteen-minute walk or hike in the woods creates measurable changes in our body's physiology. Not only does it provide variety in our daily activities and exercise regimes, but it also generates higher levels of those "feel good hormones" we call endorphins.

This spring in our Nation's Capital, find a way to get outside, cherish life's simple pleasures and elevate your mood and your heart rate. ☯