



What is forest bathing, and why is it good for you?

If you haven't heard of forest bathing yet, you're in for a treat. The purpose of forest bathing is to calm your body and mind by connecting with nature. Forest bathing is scientifically proven to be good for your mental and physical health because it lowers stress levels, boosts immunity and improves mood. So, if you're looking for a way to enhance your wellbeing, consider giving forest bathing a try!

What is forest bathing?

Forest bathing is an ancient relaxation practice that comes from Japan, also known as Shinrin-yoku. Forest bathing means slowly and mindfully taking in your natural surroundings. Although you don't literally take a bath, the goal is to bathe in the environment of the forest, using all your senses to soak up the beauty of nature. Forest bathing could involve walking, sitting, meditating or exercising in a forest environment or in a similar type of quiet and peaceful green space.

Forest bathing has been linked to mental and physical health benefits in Japan. This led scientists to research how spending time in nature can help us to improve our health and wellbeing. One of the first Japanese scientists to investigate forest bathing, Professor Yoshifumi Miyazaki, said:

"Although the simple act of walking in a forest might not seem extraordinary, the benefits that people experience during and after forest bathing really are."

What are the benefits of forest bathing?

According to a 2019 medical review by Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine, forest bathing has many positive effects on our bodies and minds by lowering stress levels, enhancing immunity and improving mood. This can lead to a wide variety of improvements in physical and mental health, such as:



Physical health: Forest bathing can regulate blood pressure, which improves heart health and decreases the risk of heart disease. It can also reduce blood sugar levels, which helps to prevent diabetes. Forest bathing can even boost immune system activity in patients fighting cancer.

Mental health: The benefits of forest bathing also extend to our mental health. Being in the quiet and green environment of a forest brings a sense of security and calm to our minds, reducing anxiety and negative emotions. A 2020 study by the University of Portland found that forest bathing was beneficial for people experiencing depression, anxiety, loneliness, or social isolation.

How does forest bathing work?

Forest bathing essentially works by reducing our stress levels and boosting our immune system's defences. Scientists believe that one of the critical reasons forest bathing is relaxing is because the colours of nature are soothing, according to a report by Forestry England. Studies have shown that people relax best while seeing greens and blues found everywhere in nature.

Even 15 minutes of forest bathing has been shown to reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol. This helps activate the body's relaxation response, which leads to better mood and immune system function.

Another reason why forest bathing is so beneficial for our health is how peaceful and quiet forests are compared with city environments. For example, people who walked for 15 minutes in a forest experienced significantly reduced stress levels than people who walked for the same amount of time in an urban environment.

Use your five senses to maximise the benefits

The best way to maximise the benefits of forest bathing is by using mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness goes hand in hand with forest bathing because it encourages you to experience nature using all five senses (vision, smell, hearing, touch, and taste). Practising mindfulness helps your brain switch off and fully connect with the present moment. This has been shown to improve mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

Try these mindfulness techniques to help get you in touch with each of your senses:

- **Vision:** Move through the forest slowly so you can be observant. Look closely at nature's small details and the colours around you. What can you see?
- **Hearing:** Move quietly to pick up small noises, like the wind rustling in the trees or forest animals and birds moving around you. Using this process, you might be surprised by the number of wild forest inhabitants you can hear.
- **Touch:** Run your hands over tree trunks or pick up fallen leaves. If you're able to, try to find a spot where you can take off your shoes and put your bare feet on the ground for a moment.
- **Smell:** Take in slow, deep breaths through your nose and try to pull the air deep into your abdomen (where your lower ribs are). What can you smell?
- **Taste:** As you practice deep and slow breathing, try to notice the difference in air quality. Does the air taste cleaner and fresher?

Practising this will help you to form a deeper connection with nature. The benefits of forest bathing become even stronger when combined with mindfulness.

Start forest bathing today

Forest bathing is a great way to naturally boost your health and wellbeing by lowering stress levels, enhancing immunity and improving mood. If you don't have a forest environment nearby, try to find a peaceful and quiet park, lake or beach instead.

Remember to work your way through the mindful techniques so that you fully experience your surroundings using all five senses. This will allow the healing power of nature to revitalise your body and mind. Science shows that you can experience the benefits of forest bathing in as little as 15 minutes, so why not get started today!

Contact us

Forest bathing is a great way to improve your mental and physical health, but if you're looking for expert support, Validium can help. Our team of experts are available to provide you with the support you need through counselling, therapy or coaching. Please contact us through your employer for more information about our services.

