

Mother Nature offers stress relief in spades



MARK PAVILONS

Reality is the leading cause of stress, according to Lily Tomlin. There's nothing quite like a dose of reality first thing in the morning to get you moving. I prefer a freshly brewed cup of coffee. Many believe that stress doesn't occur naturally, like thunderstorms or the changing of the leaves. Stress is what we do to our own bodies, reacting to stressful situations. Of course there are stressful situations, some of our own making. Others are beyond our control. There are many reasons to get stressed out these days, maybe more than ever before in our lives. Again, we have to choose how we react. Yes, we have a choice ?? get worked up, or learn to relax, channel, ease, and release the tension as it builds. Many people also contend that you can actually see stress on someone's face. I call it ?careworn,?? a term I fondly remember from ?The Wizard of Oz, used describing Aunt Em. Our mind set is extremely important and if you think about it, it's all that matters. Most of us have our own ways of dealing with stress on a daily basis. While it may not be practical to dart out during our lunch hour for a stint of hot yoga, we can simply take a few moments to decompress, meditate, or head outside, where the real ?cure?? to stress lies. Yes, my friends, as much as stress is a creation of our own minds, the relief is Nature itself. The outdoors offer a cornucopia of sights, sounds and feelings to ease a troubled mind. ?Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolmasters, and teach some of us more than we can ever learn from books,? said John Lubbock. To me, there's nothing more peaceful than sitting outside in my back yard in the summer, feeling the sun kiss my face, and enjoying a gentle breeze as it surrounds me. It's like a fresh blanket for the soul. You may have already known this and ask why it's taking so long for people to figure it out. The Dutch, for instance, undertake ?outblowing,? or ?uitwaaien.?? It's basically activity spent outdoors in the wind, whether going for a walk, run or bike ride. I suppose a car ride works too, if the windows are down. Uitwaaien is something they do to clear their minds and it's literally out with the bad air, in with the good. I fully concur with Shrek on this: ?? Better out than in. ? Okay, he was talking about the other end, but it's still good advice! The answer, my friend, may very well be blowing in the wind. Thanks, Bob Dylan! As little as five minutes per day spent outside immersed in nature can do wonders. Many researchers have found similar results, linking activities like nature walks with reduced levels of depression, perceived stress, and negative emotions. Some research goes even further, reporting that walking in nature can help reduce headaches, improve immune function, and even increase anticancer protein production. We all have our favourite places or things that trigger joy. Who doesn't love water, or the sound of waves crashing to shore?? Who doesn't enjoy the chatter of birds, the smell of a camp fire? I visited someone in the Holland Marsh recently. There, I stood in amazement of the acres and acres of flat, fertile lands. Just staring at the horizon made me feel at peace. Research shows time spent in forests or just looking at trees or photos of them, boosts immune systems, lowers blood pressure, improves mood and ability to focus, and increases energy levels and sleep quality. Studies have shown that people who live closer to the coast, report better physical and psychological health than those farther inland. Water may have a restorative effect, helping us overcome negative emotions and diminish our mental distress. I'm a firm believer that this is no accident. All life on this planet emerged from the water, so we have an inherent connection with it. ?Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads,?? Henry David Thoreau once wrote. And John Burroughs said he went to nature ?to have my senses put in order. ? And scientists have more evidence to support this. One Japanese physician said trees and plants release antibacterial and antimicrobial substances in the air. If we breathe them in, they can help us get stronger, too, and help fight disease. We are all well aware by this point ? made quite evident by COVID-19 -? that stress can damage our health and well-being.

We take vitamins and eat well to help our bodies. A "dose" of Nature is abundant, and free. I've been told to meditate now and then and that it does wonders to calm both mind and body. I've watched "The Secret," which indicates we need to connect with the universe, and it will respond. Friends and family members swear by yoga, Reiki, prayer and aromatherapy. There's a lot that we still don't know about existence, human origins and life in the universe. We may very well be connected in ways we can't even imagine. What is obvious is the abundance and beauty of Nature - it's all around us. From a blade of grass to the oldest of redwoods, the natural world is simply amazing. Again, this is no accident. Just as we can surround ourselves with positivity and optimism, so should we wrap our loving arms around what the world offers. Breathe deeply and let it all out!