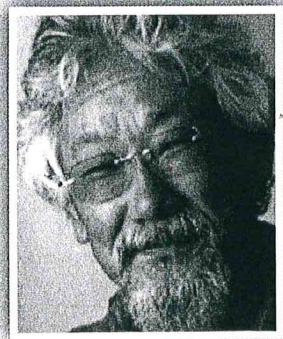


Add a Daily Dose of Green to Your Routine

By David Suzuki



Is your office bad for your health and well-being? Unfortunately, a growing body of scientific evidence says yes.

The modern workday pose – fingers on keyboard, slight slouch, glassy eyes fixed on glowing screen, bathed in unnatural light – can drain vitality, happiness and creativity. Designed to maximize efficiency, this sterile setup actually reduces productivity and job satisfaction.

In fact, modern workplaces are the main reason adults now spend about 9.3 hours a day sitting. Medical journal *The Lancet* estimates this unprecedented level of inactivity is causing 5.3 million deaths a year worldwide, similar to smoking – prompting the *Harvard Business Review* to suggest ‘Sitting is the smoking of our generation.’

The good news is that researchers have built an increasingly persuasive case for what most of us know intuitively: nature is good for us. Being regularly immersed in a natural setting can reduce stress while boosting immunity, ingenuity and energy.

As neuroscientist Marc Berman explains, adding a daily dose of green to your routine may be the best prescription for dealing with workday stress. His research shows that even simple, brief interactions with nature can improve cognitive control and mood.

Why does green time reduce stress? Various studies suggest exposure to natural settings stimulates ‘soft fascination’ – something *New York Times* reporter Gretchen Reynolds describes as ‘a beguiling term for quiet contemplation, during which directed attention is barely called upon and the brain can reset those overstretched

resources.’ Hard fascination, by contrast, is stimulated by bright, loud activities like watching TV or sports, which require little or no effort but don’t allow for mental rest.

Researchers at the University of Michigan estimated that memory performance and attention span can improve by 20 per cent after an hour in nature; while University of Rochester studies concluded that being outside for 20 minutes a day is enough to boost vitality. And a new study from Scotland demonstrated brain fatigue can be eased with just a 10-minute walk in the park.

But how can we fit more green time into our hectic schedules?

The David Suzuki Foundation has a solution. The 30x30 Nature Challenge asks Canadians to commit to spending at least 30 minutes a day in nature for 30 days in May. Participants can take the 30x30 pledge at davidsuzuki.org/30x30Challenge and receive tips about how to add green time to their routines.

Finding your nature fix can be easy. Hold your next meeting outdoors – maybe make it a walking meeting. Invite colleagues to have lunch in a nearby park. Take the scenic route home and go for a walk in a neighborhood green space along the way. Stop to smell the flowers and take notice of critters, trees and plants. Skip the gym, and head outside for a jog or bike ride.

Even if you can’t make it outside for a daily dose of nature, simple changes inside can help make you happier and healthier. As Alan Logan and Eva Selhub document in their book *Your Brain on Nature*, workers in windowless settings are more anxious, hostile and depressed than colleagues on windowed floors. Increasing natural light within the workplace has been linked to improved productivity and contentment. Researchers in Texas even found employees in offices with plants or green-space views felt greater job satisfaction and reported a higher overall quality of life.

Increased exposure to nature also leads people to nurture closer relationships and build stronger community bonds. When Capilano University professor Joe Kelly spent at least an hour a day outside each day this March, he observed that ‘free of

the distractions and background noise present in the city, the serenity of nature provides a perfect venue to connect with others.’

Even the world’s worst boss should know employees who are less stressed and healthier are more productive. So why not sign up for the 30x30 Nature Challenge – and encourage your office mates to join? Challenge your entire company to head outside for 30 minutes a day for 30 days. And be sure to take part in the surveys before and after. Tell us how you feel. Does regular time in nature make you calmer? More alert? Happier? Let’s all get into the nature habit. It can make our lives better

Dr. David Suzuki is a scientist, broadcaster, author, and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation. Article provided complements of Troy Media.

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