

5

MINUTE NATURE BREAKS

BY

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Feeling Corona- Stressed?

Try these proven nature-based stress relieving exercises.

Our bodies and brains were built to respond to the natural world. It's only been in the last few hundred years that we have started living and working in urban environments. Nature has the ability to change our brain and body chemistry for the better. Time in nature will:

- Improve your focus
- Boost your immune system
- Help in preventing and recovering from injury
- Lower your cholesterol
- Improve your mood and reactivity
- Lower your stress (and stress hormones)

Our circumstances today dictate that we limit socializing in person and stay home as much as possible - difficult but necessary tasks to protect our friends and loved ones. Being at home doesn't mean we don't have access to nature. You may think you need to get to a park or a big open space in order to do these exercises. Our motto is "the greener the better, and any nature will do." If you can't get to a park or open space, a small garden, tree or strip of grass will work just fine. If you are in an apartment, a house plant or natural object will work just fine.

Let's get creative, and stay healthy!

We are all in this together.



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Activity Prep:

For each of these activities, focus on you *intention*: To reduce stress. To feel joy. To ground. To connect with yourself. When your mind wanders, redirect your *attention* back to the activity and your intention for yourself. Research has shown us that our minds and imagination are powerful things, able to affect our felt experience. If it is hard for you to focus on these exercises, don't give up! With practice these become more and more effective. Be curious, don't judge, and see what you can learn.

Mindful Walking

Mindfulness - observing yourself and your world without judgement - is a core benefit of connecting with nature. For this nature break, spend your walk focusing on being completely present. Leave the past and the future behind. Put a small smile on your face, and just observe. Notice your breath, notice how your feet contact the ground. Notice the plants, the sky, the bugs, the sounds, the temperature and the smells. If your thoughts wander to what happened earlier today, or what is yet to come, gently bring them back to what you can observe. As we learn to observe and be present while walking through a park, we can bring that same mindset to the rest of our lives. By being mindful and present, we begin to see things differently. We can choose how we respond and not be a slave to our reactions, making us more successful in our work and relationships.



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Biggest and Smallest

Find the biggest living thing in your green space. Examine it closely and with curiosity. Have a conversation with it. What would you like to know? If it could talk, what would be its voice? Now find the smallest living thing in your green space, and repeat. How was this conversation different? What made you choose that big or small thing to speak to? Make sure to smile and say thank you when you leave!

Counting Kinds

As you walk around your green space, count the kinds: Count the different kinds of flowers, grasses, trees, bugs, leaves, rocks and terrain. You may think you need a big space for this break - you don't! Tiny spaces often reveal the coolest secrets.

My Favorite Thing

Find a favorite natural object in your space. Go with your gut, don't feel guilty - feel grateful! Gratitude is a healthy and easy to practice emotion, perfect to combine with time in nature and enhance the health benefits of both. Gratitude reduces stress and aggression, improves physical health and energy levels and can even make people like you more. Spend your break with your favorite object, start with a small smile and a feeling of gratitude and help it grow into an overwhelming emotion.



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Feet on the Ground

Find a patch of earth, take off your shoes and socks, and let your feet touch the ground. Breathe deeply. Close your eyes, or look softly down. Focus on your connection to the earth - this big, wonderful and mysterious thing that we get to call home. Feel that gratitude and practice being present and mindful. Bonus points for doing this exercise in the winter!

Leaves and Shadows

Exactly that! Look for leaves and the shadows they cast. This is another mindfulness and observation based exercise that allows you to get creative with what you see. Choose leaves on trees, on grasses, bushes, barren fall and winter branches, and look at the shadows they cast. Observe without judgement, notice the details. Now get creative! Try drawing what you see, finding shapes in the shadows, or noticing how they change as the sun moves across the sky.

Close Your Eyes

Find a tree and close your eyes. Use your other senses, primarily touch, to explore it. Set a timer and use the entire five minutes to get up close and person with that tree. Mindfully observe using your other senses. As a variation, do this with a rock, a patch of grass, or a (non-poisonous) plant. Focusing on the small details is another way to practice mindfulness.



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Five Senses (maybe 4...)

Using the sense of taste may be a bad idea unless you are trained in edible plants. For this exercise use the rest of your senses to observe an area. Get a sheet of paper and list and describe all the things you can see, smell, hear and feel. If you feel yourself getting distracted from your senses, gently bring your focus back. Notice the change on your skin as the wind passes. Notice how many living things that you can hear. Notice how many different colors you can see. See how long you can make your list during your five minute break.

Finding the Webs

This nature moment is all about finding the connections between natural objects. Find two objects, and brainstorm all the ways they interact and influence each other. An ant may be connected to the tree through the soil and water. A rock may be connected to the flower through proximity, color or shape. Get creative in exploring your surroundings, and don't forget - you are also a part of this system. How are you connected to your natural space?

Changing Seasons

Finally, applying these exercises over the changing seasons makes for a beautiful and unique perspective on "your" natural spaces. Try making a photo journal, photographing the same object from the same spot over weeks and months, then taking time to review them in order as the light and temperature changes. If you are in a place like Florida where there are two seasons, this exercise will illuminate subtle differences you've never noticed before.



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Day	Exercise	How did it go? What did you notice?	How did you feel before? (1 to 10)	How do you feel after? (1 to 10)
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Use this journal to be mindful about your mindfulness practice!

Write what you notice, and how you felt before and after the exercise on a scale of 1 to 10.



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