



Basmati

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The Benefits Of Hiking



Here in the Northern Hemisphere, summer is right around the corner. The weather's getting better, plants are sprouting, and gardens are being planted. That's right, it's time to get outside ! I'm lucky enough to live in Colorado, where hiking trails are literally right outside my front door. But even if you have to make a drive to hit the trails, it's worth the trip – hiking provides a physical workout and mental calm that few other exercises can deliver in a neat little package. Hiking is great for your muscles, your endurance, and even your mental wellbeing.

Whether you're a first time hiker or a trail aficionado, hiking may be just what the doctor ordered, literally.

Here are 8 great reasons to hit the trails:

Tones You All Over

Hiking is a fantastic cardio workout that strengthens several different muscle groups. While at the gym you may have to use different machines to work different muscles, hiking tones you all over. Hiking works your core, glutes, calves, feet, hamstrings, quads, many obliques, and increases endurance and stamina. It also improves your heart and lung health! What better way to exercise than to work several muscle groups at once – with a view.

Improves Mental & Emotional Health

Spending time outside is really beneficial for mental health! Studies show that even spending 90 minutes outside can drastically decrease episodes of rumination (getting caught up in a negative feedback loop of self criticism), which can be common in those who experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Time spent in the green outdoors calms your brain, specifically the subgenual prefrontal cortex, relaxing your mood and shifting your perspective. During a hike, you're not only spending time in the great outdoors, you're also exercising – another well-known way to reduce stress, elevate your mood, and gain some perspective. Some research even shows that walking can help people cope with loss and grief. Moving your body while enjoying the vastness of nature is a sure way to take a step back from everyday life.

Boosts Brain Power

Unplugging and surrounding yourself with nature can have some serious mental benefits. Getting outside and removing yourself from an overwhelming amount of stimuli can reboot your system, make you more relaxed, and even more creative. In fact, research shows that participants who spent four days in nature, unplugged from technology, demonstrated a *50% increase* in creativity and problem solving. We've talked a lot about the importance of unplugging and giving yourself a break from technology here at basmati.com. Why not enjoy the great outdoors while you're at it?

Acts As Preventative Health Care

Believe it or not, hiking is good for more than your mental wellbeing and a tough workout – it keeps you healthy! In fact, regular hiking can actually regulate blood sugar and blood pressure. It also makes the hiker less likely to have a heart attack, stroke, and develop certain cancers! Hiking can also reduce the risk for osteoporosis and arthritis. Hiking even keeps your weight in check (it can burn around 500 calories per hour, depending on how strenuous the hike is!). Getting in a good workout and expending pent up energy can help you sleep better at night, too.

Makes You Mindful

Getting outside is good for your spiritual health. Spending time in nature (whether you're moving your body or not) is a great way to encourage mindfulness. When I spend time in nature, I often find myself overwhelmed – in a good way. The majesty of the mountains, the burbling of a nearby stream, and seeing different wildlife go on about their days gets me every time. Being out in nature reminds me that I'm a part of something so much bigger, and ultimately can make daily concerns seem insignificant when compared to the bigger picture. And if going on a hike doesn't mitigate a specific problem, it can give you a break from

thinking about it constantly, providing a chance to “press pause.” Returning to an issue with a clear head and calmer nerves can help to navigate obstacles in a more productive way. Mindfulness has been shown to increase tolerance, objectivity, and even increase focus.

But mindfulness isn't just about solving existing problems – it can work preventatively, too. When you regularly practice mindfulness, it can equip you to have a more objective perspective on an issue in the first place.

Improves Relationships

All that mindfulness can allow you to spend more quality time in your relationships, too. Technology can impact our relationships in negative ways and it's sometimes too easy to get caught up in daily commutes, chores, and lists, so going on a hike can be a great way to bond with family, friends, or a significant other. Hiking with someone can make it more fun, while allowing you to build your relationships outside of technology, work, and chores.

Hitting the trails can also be a creative way to build a sense of community! Try finding a Meetup in your area, or look for local hiking groups. This can be a great way to meet new people with similar interests, in a low-pressure situation and with lots of conversation starters!

Stepping away from the daily hustle and bustle to spend time with those you care about can have a lasting effect on your relationship.

Hiking is also a great way to exercise with your dog! Unfortunately, you can't take Fido to the gym with you, and dog parks are generally focused on Fido's physical fitness while you get very little movement. Instead, hiking is an activity where you both can be outside, explore the great outdoors, and get fit, too.

Ups Your Vitamin D Intake

Going for a hike exposes you to vitamin D – an essential vitamin for mood regulation, bone health, blood pressure regulation, and immune system development. Vitamin D is also important in preventing cardiovascular disease and cancer. In 2010, a study revealed that 42% of adults in the U.S. had a vitamin D deficiency! So go forth, and get kissed by the sun!

Keeps Things Interesting

Let's face it, the elliptical three times a week can only be so mentally engaging. Hiking is a fun way to get fit, and there are virtually endless trails you can explore, which keeps things fresh. You can also incorporate other projects within your hike and learn new things – how to read a map or use a compass (or, even better, how to find your way using nature), identify wildflowers/plants/animals, forage for your favorite foods, or have a destination with a view to place your yoga mat. Try getting to the top and practicing your sun salutations, or even setting up camp!

If you don't have much experience hiking, there are some essentials you'll want to bring with you – water, sunscreen, a light snack, and maybe even a rain jacket. Make sure to be familiar with the trails or bring a map. And always make sure to tell someone where you're going – no matter if it's your first or fiftieth time to the top.

If you're a seasoned trailblazer, find some ways to ramp up your hike – learn more about your surroundings, or research new trails in your area. The great thing about hiking is it never gets old – there's always something new to explore in Mother Nature.

Hiking can be a much-needed solitary break, a fun way to bond with friends, or a great way to teach your kids to connect with nature!

Whatever your motivations, you're sure to find what you need and more in the great outdoors.

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