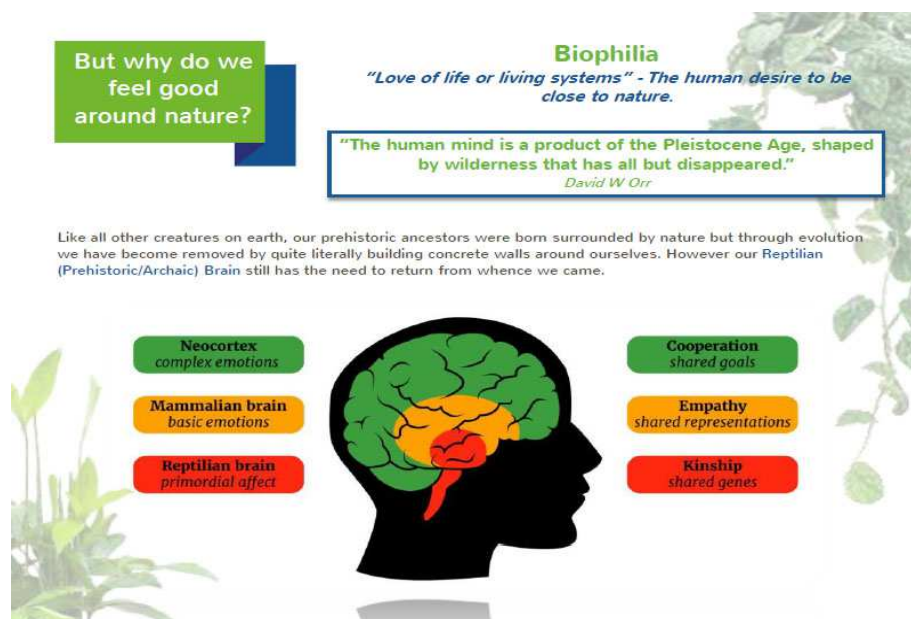


Nature improves energy levels and is good for our physical and mental health

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Everyone has heard the term biophilia even if they don't have an understanding of what it means. That is unlikely too as it has been written and spoken about so much in the last few years. The most basic explanation of biophilia explains our need to connect with nature.



Back in 2010, Professor Richard Ryan of the University of Rochester, conducted a number of studies relating to how nature energises us. He found that the increased vitality that we feel after a foray into nature affects us beyond that of physical activity or social interaction.

"Nature is fuel for the soul, " says Richard Ryan, lead author and a professor of psychology at the University of Rochester. "Often when we feel depleted we reach for a cup of coffee, but research suggests a better way to get energised is to connect with nature."





Professor Richard Ryan

Research suggests that our connection or interaction with nature is good for both our mental and our physical health. It doesn't just improve our energy levels but also makes us more resilient to physical illness.

'In recent years, numerous experimental psychology studies have linked exposure to nature with increased energy and heightened sense of well-being. For example, research has shown that people on wilderness excursions report feeling more alive and that just recalling outdoor experiences increases feelings of happiness and health. Other studies suggest that the very presence of nature helps to ward off feelings of exhaustion and that 90 percent of people report increased energy when placed in outdoor activities.'

The studies which Ryan initiated tested whether the increased vitality experienced with being outdoors was a 'hangover' from physical activity or mixing with others.

Taking a sample of 537 college students, Ryan took them on two 15 minute walks, one through indoor corridors and one along a tree-lined river path. In another experiment, the students viewed photographic scenes of buildings or landscapes; in another, the students were asked to imagine themselves in various situations both active and sedentary and inside and out. In the two final experiments, they were asked to keep a diary of their moods and energy levels and finally to record their exercise, social interactions, time spent outside and exposure to natural environments including plants and windows. This was over either four days or two weeks.





In all of these experiments, Ryan found that the participants felt more energetic when they spent time in nature or in natural settings and even when they imagined themselves in these conditions. The results showed that being amongst nature for just 20 minutes a day was enough to significantly boost vitality levels.

"We have a natural connection with living things," says Ryan. "Nature is something within which we flourish, so having it be more a part of our lives is critical, especially when we live and work in built environments." These studies, concludes Ryan, underscore the importance of having access to parks and natural surroundings and of incorporating natural elements into our buildings through windows and indoor plants.

