

How nature can help you be at your best

Nature is always there - patient, non-judgmental, spacious, solid and beautiful - what could be more reassuring? It can have a powerful impact on our wellbeing and as you spend more time in nature or green space, you'll notice its immediate calming effect.

Why is this? Well, when we spend time in nature we slow down naturally which lowers the heart rate, blood pressure and stress hormone levels (cortisol and adrenaline). As the body softens, the nervous system calms down and we feel more relaxed, grounded (in the body vs in the head), calm and more confident about ourselves and life. Being in nature strengthens our immune system, improves mood and reduces feelings of isolation.

Spending time in nature also reminds us of our interconnectedness with all life, it helps us connect to something bigger than ourselves, fostering a deeper, kinder connection with ourselves, others and the world.

On the following pages there are three powerful exercises you can do in nature:

4-3-2-1 Return to your senses with nature

The Four Element Practice – experience the restorative effect of nature

Mindful walking in nature to reset and restore the mind



How nature can help you be at your best (contd.)



4-3-2-1 Return to your senses with nature

This 10 minute exercise will help to ground you, clear your mind and heighten your awareness, bringing you a greater sense of perspective. It can be done anywhere in nature.

- Notice **4** things that you see – rest your eyes on these 4 things, take them in one at a time: the shape of clouds in the sky, flower blossom, a tall tree.
- Listen out for **3** sounds that you hear – really tune into each sound, let each sound come to you: birdsong, children’s laughter, the wind in the trees.
- Focus on **2** things that you can feel: the fresh air on your skin, the material of your clothes on your body or your feet on the earth.
- Pay attention to **1** thing you can smell or touch: the earthy smell in the air, the smell of a flower or blossom, the touch of a tree trunk or bush, a stone, a leaf or the grass...

Spend a moment in silence and notice the effect of the practice in your mind, body, heart.



How nature can help you be at your best (contd.)



The Four Element Practice – experience the restorative effect of nature

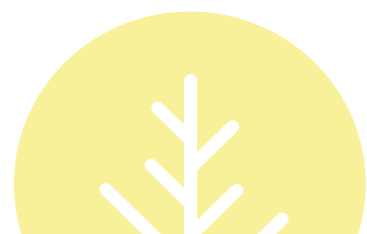
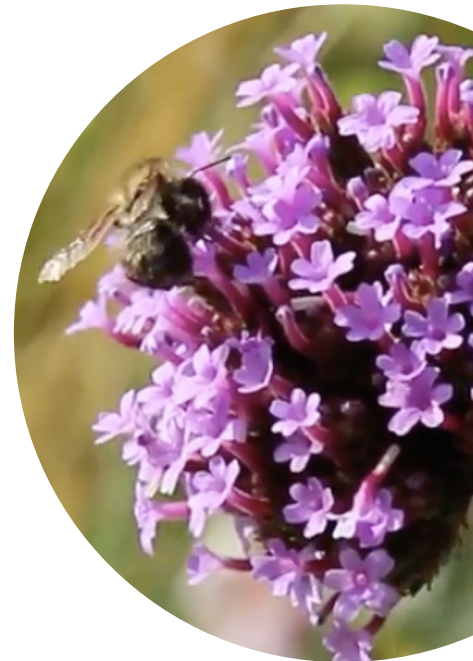
Ground yourself in the present with this enjoyable exercise and experience your intrinsic connection with nature. This practice can be done on your own or with your partner, spouse, children, and friends.

Find a quiet, comfortable place in your back garden, your local park or your favourite place in nature.

Place the soles of your feet firmly on the earth (if you are sitting on a bench or chair) or if you are sitting on the ground, feel your legs, knees in contact with the earth. Have your upper body poised with your face soft and relaxed (so that the heart can also relax).

- **Earth:** Notice the solidity of the earth beneath your feet, sense how the earth is holding your whole body; notice the bones in your body as firm as the element earth.
- **Water:** Bring to mind a nearby river, stream, sea, a pond or rain. Tune into the softness and fluidity of water. Notice the shared properties as the fluids that keep your body alive: blood, sweat, saliva, urine. Can you get a sense of the blood flowing through your veins, of the saliva in your mouth?
- **Fire:** Imagine and feel the warmth and energy of the sun on your skin, the heat of wood fire? Now imagine and feel your body temperature, the temperature of your skin, the warmth of your heart radiating well-wishing and kindness.
- **Air:** Imagine and feel the freshness of spring air on your face, is it cool or soft? Both? Then notice your breath, soft air floating in and out of your body, really sense the subtle movements of the breath in your body (belly and chest).

Notice what's here now in your awareness.



How nature can help you be at your best (contd.)



Mindful walking in nature to reset and restore the mind

Nature ignites and stimulates us but it has a different effect on us than the stimuli of everyday life. Nature allows us to just be. It captures our attention involuntarily, effortlessly and so provides what's been coined as a 'restorative environment'.

Here are some easy and enjoyable steps to help you experience the restorative effect of being grounded in the present in nature.

- **Slow down your pace**, become aware of your feet on the earth, the sky above you, the fresh air on your face.
- **Notice your surroundings**. Rest your gaze on a flower, bush or tree that calls for your attention. Notice its colour, shape and size. Does it have a scent? Absorb its beauty for about 10 to 12 seconds – bearing in mind that it takes a lot longer for a pleasant experience to be rooted in the mind than it does for a negative experience.
- **Then continue your walk**, notice something else that attracts your attention and take it in.
- **Use all of your senses**. Explore the bark of a tree, the texture of some leaves. Listen to the sounds that surround you – birds, people, insects, planes.
- As you continue walking mindfully, you may want to **broaden your awareness** to take in your surroundings as a whole, the atmosphere of a particular spot. Notice the people you pass.

As humans we long to come back to our senses, to experiences that allow us to feel a connection with the world. Even a short walk in green space is enough to restore and reset the mind, to calm and relax us.



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