Recreation as Therapy

Nature heals. Spending time at a lake, in a park, on a horse, watching birds, walking in a forest – these recreations truly do re-create us. They give us new perspective on life as they put us in touch with the power and beauty of nature.

Humans simply feel better after spending time outdoors, but doing so is far less prevalent today. For many of this generation’s children, vigorous outdoor fun has been replaced by sedentary, indoor videophilia (the love of playing video games, surfing the Internet and watching movies and TV).

To capture the consequences of not being outdoors, the phrase nature deficit disorder was coined. It can result in diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties and higher rates of both physical and emotional illnesses. The natural cure is simple – outdoor recreation.

Recognition of the benefits of enjoying nature led to the development of a new field. Therapeutic recreation focuses on providing recreational services for people with disabilities. Its goal is to maintain the highest quality of life and function.

Through August 18, you can see an example of therapeutic recreation at the Chicago Field Museum’s exhibit, The Horse. It explores the special relationship between horses and humans and ends with a film that captures the positive changes horseback riding makes for people with disabilities. It is a testimony to the power of nature.

Recreation is therapeutic whether it is used as your own personal therapy or as a new field of physical therapy to help those in need. Come closer to nature. You will experience its benefits just by sharing an afternoon with it.

Therapeutic Recreation Week – July 10 to 16

Prayer: Dear God, I am often busy and bogged down in work. Remind me to take the time to relax outdoors and enjoy all of your creation. Amen.

The Value of Outdoor Recreation

Enjoying outdoor recreation is comparatively rare today. Although Americans have 35 to 40 hours of free time each week, most of it is in small chunks and on weekdays. TV viewing takes up about half of all free time; staring at a variety of other screens adds to that. And if car travel is considered an indoor activity, we spend 95 percent of our lives inside!

But humans evolved from a life of hunting and gathering on the plains of Africa. Our species hasn’t had time to adapt to today’s fatty diets, cars, artificial light and heating. This mismatch between our bodies and our environment may account for many preventable illnesses, including some emotional diseases.

There is ever-growing evidence that the outdoors is healthy:

✦ Nature positively affects blood pressure, cholesterol, outlook on life, stress and behavior problems of children.
✦ Pollution is often greater inside homes and offices than outdoors.
✦ Obesity is a greater danger indoors since people are more likely to sit around watching TV and snacking.

Our world has changed. Because the major causes of death have shifted from disaster (starvation, war) and contagious disease (smallpox, malaria) to decay (heart disease, cancer), individual behaviors play an increasingly important role in both longevity and quality of life.

Spending time outdoors is a choice that is rewarding in so many ways, and summer is the perfect time to get back to nature and enjoy its beauty.

- www.advocatehealth.com
- American Canoe Association – americancanoe.org
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – nfwf.org
- National Park Service – nps.gov
- Leave No Trace – lnt.org
- Corps Recreation Information – CorpsLakes.us
- National Recreation Reservation Service – recreation.gov