

YOU NEED A BRAINCATION

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Cognitive scientists are only just beginning to understand what being in nature does for our mental health. But—big surprise!—the evidence is promising. Here are five smart reasons to go wild.

1. Increased attention span. A 2008 study by University of Michigan psychologists found that walking outside or even just looking at pictures of natural settings improves directed attention, the ability to concentrate on a task. Put another way: nature restores our ability to focus.

2. Better memory. The same study supported previous experiments showing that being in nature improves memory—by 20 percent when it came to recalling a series of numbers.

3. Reduced stress. Office workers with views of trees and flowers reported lower stress levels, higher job satisfaction, and fewer physical ailments than colleagues with views of buildings, according to a 1989 study by the University of Michigan.

4. Improved mood. In a 1991 study by Texas A&M psychologists, subjects who viewed scenes of water or trees reported a much quicker return to a positive mood after a stressful event than those who viewed urban scenes.

5. Greater creativity. In a pilot study this March, psychologists found that students in an Outward Bound course showed a 40 percent boost in frontal-lobe activity—which is linked to creativity—after four days in the backcountry.