

# Connecting Trees and Human Health

After weeks of social distancing, distance learning and confinement in our homes, people are ready for the outdoors! Whether it is a walk around the neighborhood, a visit to the local park or a trip to one of North Dakota's scenic State Parks, trees frame the landscape.

Benefits of trees go beyond measurable energy savings and increased property values, and products like wood, medicines, fruit and nuts. Studies in recent decades show that time spent immersed in nature (and among trees) is really, scientifically good for us.



There's nothing quite like a tree's unique ability to bring us a bit of calm.

- 1. Trees care for your heart.** Exposure to trees relaxes and restores your mind, lowering your blood pressure and heart rate.
- 2. Trees care for your fitness.** Green spaces like parks and tree-lined streets encourage walking, outdoor activities and generally healthier lifestyles.
- 3. Trees care for your skin.** Shade from trees reduces exposure to harmful UV rays, reducing your chances of developing skin cancer.
- 4. Trees care for your lungs.** Trees help keep our world clean by filtering particles out of the air we breathe, decreasing the risk of respiratory illnesses.
- 5. Trees care for your nutrition.** Fruit and nuts from trees contain antioxidants which boost your immune system and provide healthy fats to help decrease bad cholesterol levels (*TIP: see Northern Hardy Fruit Evaluation Project @ crecfruit* Located at the NDSU Research Extension Center near Carrington, the project has proven that North Dakota is great for growing aronia, currants, hazelnuts and honeyberries)
- 6. Trees care for your peace of mind.** Exposure to trees – even a view of trees through a window – decreases mental fatigue by relaxing and restoring your mind as well as providing a sense of security.
- 7. Trees care for your vitality.** Trees absorb pollutants so you can breathe clean, fresh air, helping your brain release serotonin to boost your energy and mood.
- 8. Trees care for your brain.** Try some homeschool sessions outside! Kids who play in nature are more relaxed and attentive; this improves learning and performance in school. This works for students of any age.
- 9. Trees care for your fighting power.** Being in and around nature helps your body's immune system and boosts disease-fighting cells to act faster.
- 10. Trees care for your healing.** Being able to see trees through a hospital window while recovering from surgery increases a patient's pain thresholds, requiring less pain medication and shortening recovery time.
- 11. Trees care for your health.** Are you familiar with the phrase “forest bathing”? This experience can be as simple as walking in any natural environment. The practice emerged as a fitness trend in Japan in the 1980's, but many cultures have long recognized the importance of the natural world to human health. In some states, healthcare providers can prescribe to patient's time among the trees where they live, work, and play to help improve their health.

For more on the subject of trees and health and links to the science that supports it, see “Healthy Trees, Healthy Lives” at [www.southernforests.org](http://www.southernforests.org)

Do your part to connect trees to human health! Become an active steward and advocate for community forestry where you live. The ND Forest Service provides technical and financial assistance (grants for projects on public property) to communities across the state.

Contact: Gerri Makay, Community Forestry Program Manager, NDFS [Gerri.Makay@ndsu.edu](mailto:Gerri.Makay@ndsu.edu) | Office 701-652-2951 | Cell 701-652-5055