

20 minutes, 5 hours, 3 days / The Comfort Crisis / Michael Easter (2019)

Summary

In his wonderful book 'The Comfort Crisis', Easter tells his journey into deepest, darkest Alaska. Woven through the story is research about the benefits of nature and trips away from our 'comfortable' lives.

- Scientists have proven that the outdoors is a potent antidote to chronic disease and burnout
- Just 20-minutes in nature can change the brain, lower cortisol and leave us calmer, sharper, more productive, and more creative
- Research also shows that 5 hours in nature, and 3 days in wilder nature, also show significant benefits for body, mind, performance and wellbeing.

“(A Japanese study) found that people who spent about 15 minutes sitting in and then walking through nature experienced all kinds of drops in the measurements that doctors care about. Blood pressure readings, heart rates, and stress hormone levels all went down. In another study, people with the highest levels of stress felt a significant drop in anxiety, depression, and hostility after only two hours in the woods.

The Japanese scientists are so confident in the power of nature that they have bravely led out into the forest groups of people with bad hearts, kidneys, or immune systems. The people shuffled about and sat around - just generally 'bathed' in the forest. Each group showed improvements.

They're proving that the outdoors is one potent antidote to the modern human conditions of chronic disease and being overstressed, overstimulated, and overworked.”

20 minutes

A 20-minute stroll through a city park... can cause profound changes in the neurological structure of our brains. This leaves us feeling calmer and with sharper and more productive, creative minds. But people who use cell-phones on these walks see none of these benefits. 20 minutes outside, three times a week, is the dose of nature that most efficiently dropped people's levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

With

20 minutes, 5 hours, 3 days (Cont.)

In nature your brain enters a mode (Hopman) called ‘**soft fascination**’... Brain scans show that soft fascination is a lot like meditation. Hopman described it as a mindfulness-like state that restores and builds the resources we need to think, create, process information, and execute tasks.”

In today’s economy, where people can’t detach from work emails, **nearly a quarter to half of all employees say they’re burned out**... it doesn’t have to be complicated. Just passing through a park or by some trees on a walk to a coffee shop has benefits.

Almost immediately when people are in nature or even see nature they report feeling better and their behaviour changes.

“...People are busy, I get it. Some days you’ll have a pile of work. A walk through a park seems unfeasible. Any time away from the grind feels like too much time away from the grind. (But) think of that short walk outside like a high return investment in yourself. Those 20 minutes in the park may cause you to pump out (more quantity and quality) than you would have done had you tried to power through the day on burnout mode.

5 hours a month

“Any time in nature is beneficial,” said Hopman... “But spending more time in wilder spaces does seem to give you more benefits... the wilder the nature the better.”

There could be a lot of reasons why nature – wilder spaces in particular – has these effects on the mind and body. It could be that in nature you are engulfed in fractals, complex patterns that repeat over and over in different sizes and scales and make up the design of the universe.

3 days

A few days in nature change your mind for the better... More time in nature seems to make people calmer. More at peace, more present, more appreciative. Happier... and the effect seems to last after you leave.

info@withdiversity.com

With

20 minutes, 5 hours, 3 days (Cont.)

Strayer studied this effect in 2012. He and his team gave half of a group of Outward Bound students the RAT test (the test where three words are thrown out and we have to figure out their common denominator – a well used test for assessing creative thinking) the morning before a 3 day trip into nature without their cellphones, and the other half after their third techless day in the backcountry. The people who were tested after the wilderness trip scored 50 percent better...

Numerous studies dropping groups into nature, from animal vets to military vets, have found that **three consecutive days in nature improves creativity, stress symptoms**, PTSD symptoms, happiness and general satisfaction.

The rewilding of our body and brain usually goes something like this:

- **Day one:** On the first day stress and health markers improve, but we are still adjusting to the discomfort of nature. We're thinking about how it sucks to be cold, missing our phone, and still focusing on the anxieties we left behind – what's happening at work and whether we closed the garage door.
- **By day two** our mind is settling and awareness is heightening. We're caring less about what we left behind and are noticing the sights, smells and sounds around us.
- **Then day three hits.** Now our senses are completely dialled-in and we can reach a fully meditative mode of feeling connected to nature. The discomfort isn't so bad. It has, in fact, shifted to a welcome sensation that signals a calmness and feeling of life satisfaction.

Day-one brain waves are beta waves. There are frenetic, type-A, go-go-go waves. **But by day three they're alpha and theta waves.** These are the same waves found in experienced meditators and people who have lapsed into an effortless flow state. These rare waves reset your thinking, revive your brain, tame burnout, and just make you feel better.

We in the modern world are riding high, violent beta brain waves more often than any humans in history, and the message is clear: **Time in nature is a hell of a way to calm the turbulent sea inside our minds.**

info@withdiversity.com