

### **NATURE: Food for the Soul**

A recent research study carried out in the USA shows that being outside in the natural environment for a mere 20 minutes per day can make a big difference to your emotional and physical health.



The study, conducted by Richard Ryan Professor of Psychology at the University of Rochester, New York, looked at college students in a number of different real and imagined settings and concluded that individuals consistently felt more energised when outside and even felt energy levels rise when they imagined being outside in the countryside.

In some ways this is not surprising because many of you will be familiar with a heightened sense of well-being following a walk in the countryside or a

feeling of increased energy having been out cycling. It appears from this study that the lift we get from the physical exercise will be increased through contact with nature.

If you live in a block of flats in the city or do not have easy access to the countryside you may find it difficult to consider how you might use this research to your benefit. Yet if you think about it, we all have little pieces of the natural world at our feet.

Many people live or work within walking distance of a park and with a little planning could take a walk around the park at lunchtime, or change the route to work to walk through the park. While you are in the park, take time to notice what is growing there, to appreciate the colour and variety of the different flowers or the different types of tree growing there. If there is any bird-life in the park, notice and enjoy that too.

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If you are fortunate enough to have a garden, you could do some gardening – mowing, digging and weeding all provide good exercise and give you the opportunity to enjoy what is growing there.



If you are not a gardener and prefer something more aerobic, take your skipping rope outside and skip for 20 minutes and appreciate your surroundings as you exercise: the shadows across the garden or perhaps the sound of birdsong.



Alternatively you could cycle or jog or walk more than you do already – all these forms of exercise take you into the natural world and allow you to slow down a little and take in what is going on around you.



Ok, so your walk to the station might not be through suburban streets, but you will no doubt pass many gardens or little corners of nature along the way and may be surprised by what you see: a beautiful splash of colour where a wild plant has taken root in a wall or a pollen-loaded bumble bee emerging from a flower.

*'Nature is fuel for the soul' says Richard Ryan in this study. 'Often when we feel depleted we reach for a cup of coffee, but research suggests a better way to get energized is to connect with nature'.*

So what's to stop you trying it? Forego that cup of coffee and take yourself outside for twenty minutes and notice how it lifts your spirits and your energy. This has a double benefit in that walking for just 20 minutes per day can cut your likelihood of having a stroke by 30%. And now's the time to try it in warm weather with lots of daylight around!

If you think that your lifestyle has the potential to create long term health problems talking to a counsellor will help. Consulting a nutritional therapist or dietician will also give you the necessary tools to implement change. Visit our website [www.orchardleeds.co.uk](http://www.orchardleeds.co.uk) or call **0113 281 9493**.

We have over 30 Counsellors, Psychotherapists and Psychologists at **The Orchard**, who would be pleased to book you in for counselling, as well as a host of Complementary Therapists.