



Hi graduate friends,

As city life increases, stresses and mental health challenges seem to increase as well. Although there are many explanations for this increase, one potential reason could be that we're simply not exposed to nature as much anymore and we're not taking advantage of the benefits it has. For example, nature has been seen to reduce rumination, meaning our repeated negative thoughts about ourselves or our problems (Bratman et al., 2015), which is something we often see in graduate students that ends up impacting their learning as well. But while it's good to know that long-term exposure to nature is good for us, we're not all going to move to rural areas now, are we? So, what shall we do instead? You won't believe this... Short-term exposure to nature! Let me tell you how it can help.



One of the most common challenges we see with students nowadays is attention. We very often hear: "I can't read an article without getting distracted" or "I can't sit to write for long without having my mind wander away". Voluntary attention to something is energy consuming and after you've used your attention purposefully for a while, it will deteriorate. Attention Restoration Theory tells us that involuntary attention to other things (also referred to as *fascination*) can help us recover (Kaplan, 1995). And it turns out, nature is a great restorative environment that can help activate that involuntary attention, especially if you take a walk in it (Mason et al., 2021). Short-term nature exposure has also shown to help reduce stress and refuel the energy used to respond to stress (Ulrich et al., 1991). All students at all educational levels (from elementary school to university) are known to benefit from contact with nature (Mason et al., 2021).



So, what can you do with that information? Well, when you're going to take a walk, see if you can take a greener route that may include more grass, trees, or possibly birds and squirrels! It can also be helpful to take nature walks in between your study sessions, when your attention and energy have been already used up, so that you can benefit more from nature's restorative power. You can also plan a nature walk before and/or after particularly stressful events like a presentation or an exam. And take a friend with you if you can; they will surely benefit from it as well!

Best,



Najmeh Keyhani (she/her/hers), PhD, from your Learning Development & Success team!

Reference:

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