

Athyrium

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Forest Bathing

Shinrin-yoku—a Japanese mindfulness practice of bathing in the forest.

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Photo by Nicola Michelle

Have you ever spent time in the forest to clear your mind? Gone for a walk in the trees to de-stress and reconnect back to yourself? Slowly stroll down a path between tall giants to observe the beauty of the leaves, the ground beneath your feet, and absorb your surroundings?

As explained in the *National Post*, this is a Japanese mindfulness practice called *Shinrin-yoku*. The term was developed by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in 1982 and translates directly as making contact with and taking in the atmosphere of the forest. For many, the term *Shinrin-yoku* is easily described as “forest bathing”.

The act of forest bathing has many benefits, both physical and mental. A study published in the *Journal of Environmental Health and Preventative Medicine* studied the physiological benefits of *Shinrin-yoku*. The results show that spending time in forest environments promotes lower blood cortisol levels (the body’s stress hormone), lower pulse rate, lower blood pressure, and greater parasympathetic nerve activity. Essentially, being in the forest decreases your stress levels.

This study noted the importance of the physical environment and how it contributes to stress. For people living in urban environments, this can

elicit a higher stress response. Furthermore, it is widely understood that the natural environment can help to enhance health and decrease stress. The results of the physiological measurements suggest that *Shinrin-yoku* can aid in relaxing the human body.

A study from the same journal says, “*Shinrin-yoku* is considered to be one of the most accessible ways to get in touch with the natural world and to lower excessive stress to levels that are commensurate with

what our bodies are ‘expected’ to cope with.” These studies of *Shinrin-yoku* provide a better understanding of the relationship between human health and forests.

Getting in touch with nature can help improve well-being. The next time you’re feeling overwhelmed by the stresses of day-to-day life, try escaping to the forest. Bathe among the trees, breathe in the fresh air of your surroundings, and observe the natural beauty that exists around you. •

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