

## **Get outside! Get Healthy!**

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It may not seem like a big deal, but spending just 20 minutes a day outside can yield big results. Lower blood pressure, decreased stress, better sleep and increase immunity – the list goes on and on - are all benefits of spending time in nature.

### Reduced Obesity

According to the Center for Disease Control, two-thirds of American adults and one-fifth of American children are obese. The effects of this are staggering – increased blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, joint problems, just to name a few. The great thing is that you can play your way to being healthy. Children who play *outside* play harder and play longer. This leads to burning more calories and a reduced likelihood of developing obesity. So, go! Go for a hike through Wilderness Park after the first big snow. Go sledding down the biggest hill you can find. Go have a snowball fight!

### Better Sleep.

When we get a bad night's sleep (or our child skips their afternoon nap) we see the results. The short-term effects of insufficient sleep are irritability, inability to concentrate and drowsiness. The long-term effects are even greater. Consistent lack of sleep can lead to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression. Not to mention, children retain what they have learned through the day only when they get a good night sleep. But spending just 30 minutes a day outside can improve your sleep. I see this especially with my children. When they play outside all afternoon, they go to bed easier and sleep better throughout the night. This leads to us all being well-rested and happy the next day. So, go! Go outside to look for animal tracks in the snow. Go make snow angels. Go make a snow fort!

### Increased Immunity.

This one is especially important. When we are born, we do not have much of an immune system. We must be exposed to germs, bacteria, and viruses to build a strong immune system. And, while some germs are unhealthy like cold and flu viruses, many germs are harmless. Getting outside is a perfect way to escape bad germs indoors while still building your immune system! And, by developing your strong immune system, you are less likely to get sick the next time the stomach bug goes around. Plus, a stronger immune system means your child will miss less school. So, go! Go look under the mulch for insects taking shelter from the cold. Go on a hike to look for songbirds. Go jump through the leaves you have yet to bag! (By the way, it is important for both children and adults to be exposed to germs to maintain a strong immune system. Just like your muscles will atrophy with lack of exercise, your immune system will decline with lack of exposure.)

It may not seem like it, but there are many reasons getting outside leads to a healthy lifestyle. So, get outside... and get healthy!

See you out there!