

Media Release

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Stressed-out Aussies look for a quick fix

How 10 minutes outside can heal an online nation

In today's time-poor and technological world, people are increasingly turning to electronic devices and social media to try to improve everyday wellbeing, with 51% of Australians saying that they visit social media sites as a way to manage their stressⁱ.

In fact, this behaviour can increase feelings of stress, depression and social isolation, yet stopping to smell the roses may be the solution.

Nature has overwhelmingly been shown to reduce stress, with just 10 minutes' spent outside in a natural environment resulting in a significant reduction in blood pressure and an improvement in mental health and wellbeingⁱ.

Released in the lead up to National Tree Day on Sunday 31st July, these results are being published in Planet Ark's *Adding Trees – A Prescription for Health, Happiness and Fulfilment* reportⁱ, sponsored by Toyota Australia.

The report examines the benefits time in nature has for five areas of life that Australians consider the most important for achieving a fulfilling life – health, happiness, learning, relaxation and relationships.

The research illustrates that nature has medically and scientifically beneficial effects that enable people to grow healthier, happier, brighter, calmer and closer. When people experience positive emotions and interactions in important areas of their everyday lives, they are significantly more likely to feel that their life has value, meaning and fulfilment.

Associate Professor Tonia Gray, Specialist in Pedagogy and Learning at Western Sydney University, says our nature-estranged lifestyle can be directly related to our over-reliance on screen time over green time.

“Our choice of indoor, sedentary hobbies, tethered to screens and electrical outlets like computer games, Wii, Nintendo, iPads, social media, or television is inextricably linked to the problem,” she says. “Yet we now recognise the importance nature connectedness as a determinant of health and wellbeing.”

Spending time in nature induces positive feelings such as relaxation, calmness, self-worth and enjoyment through a number of physiological mechanisms, including activating the brain's dopamine reward system.

The report revealed that 86% of Australians who have a close connection to nature are significantly more likely to consider themselves happy in life overallⁱ.

People who engage in daily outdoor activities also report higher levels of wellbeing, with the research showing time in nature reduces a person's chance of developing a range of diseases, including diabetes by 43%, cardiovascular disease and stroke by 37% and depression by 25%ⁱ.



Engaging in outdoor leisure activities reduces anxiety and triples a person's chance of having a restful night's sleep, with greater benefits observed in people with higher levels of stress.

Even employees who have contact with nature during their workday, such as taking lunch breaks outside, report significantly reduced stress and stress-related health complaints.

In particular, time outside in natural environments is important for young people, with 60% of teens feeling brain 'burnout' from constant connectivity of social mediaⁱⁱ. The research showed students who take part in outdoor learning programs perform better in reading, writing, maths and science, with 77% of teachers reporting student improvement in standardised testsⁱ.

Clinical psychologist Andrew Fuller says incorporating anxiety reduction methods into school years is essential, as 52% of students feel under strainⁱⁱⁱ.

"Students' brains grow quickly when they are challenged to be curious and creative," says Fuller. "One of the best ways to accomplish this is to involve young people in projects that make a difference in the world, such as community events like National Tree Day."

National Tree Day Manager Debbie Agnew says the research shows that a "prescription" for adding nature into the lives of Australians can help them enhance many aspects of their lives.

"In this digital age, Planet Ark is encouraging everyone to take 10 outside and connect with nature. Participating in a National Tree Day activity in your community, workplace, school or backyard is a great way to reconnect," she says.

For more information and to find your nearest Tree Day site, please visit treeday.planetark.org or call the National Tree Day Hotline on 1300 88 5000.

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ⁱ *Adding Trees – A Prescription for Health, Happiness and Fulfilment* report is based on an independent survey commissioned by Planet Ark, and sponsored by Toyota Australia, in March 2016. It was conducted by Pollinate, a specialist communications research company. The report also reviews Australian and international studies that examine the influence of nature on a five of key areas of life. The survey included in the report used internationally-recognised scales to measure the connection to nature and happiness of participants. To view the full report, key findings and previous Planet Ark research: <http://treeday.planetark.org/research/>

ⁱⁱ *Fear of Missing Out survey results*, Australian Psychological Society, 2015

ⁱⁱⁱ *What 91,369 young people can tell us about resilience?* Andrew Fuller & Andrew Wicking, Resilient Youth Australia 2016

About Planet Ark

Planet Ark Environmental Foundation is an Australian not-for-profit organisation with a vision of a world where people live in balance with nature. Established in 1992, we are one of Australia's leading environmental behaviour change organisations with a focus on working collaboratively and positively. We help people, governments and businesses reduce their impact on the environment in three key areas: sustainable resource use; low carbon lifestyles; and connecting people with nature. We promote and create simple, positive environmental actions – for everyone.

About Toyota Australia

Toyota Australia – now in its 14th straight year as the best-selling automotive brand in Australia – has a long tradition of supporting the community through sponsorship at both local and national levels. In 2016, Toyota will celebrate its 17th year supporting Planet Ark's National Tree Day. These longstanding partnerships are characterised by a shared passion for people, activities and organisations that benefit the community.

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