



# *Forest Baths*

*an antidote to stress*

Stress has become a silent enemy that lurks everywhere. Big cities tend to produce one thing above all else: distressed people. Urban life itself sometimes produces tension by simply walking down the street. The bombardment of stimuli can be so high, that anyone would end up stressed.

Our senses also end up being affected by stress. For example, it's harder for us to distinguish between smells due to environmental contamination. The same thing applies to sounds. In any main street of any city, the levels of noise are so high that we have to

increase the volume we use to speak. Also, we usually have to pay more attention in order to be able to hear.

**“Without well-being, life isn’t life. It’s just a state of languor and suffering.”**

**François Rabelais**

The same thing happens to our other senses. We close our eyes and look down in order to not get confused. Or even worse: we don’t enjoy what we eat because the fact that we’re always in a hurry keeps us from it. In fact, for some, lunch time is actually a waste of time. And in regards to our sense of touch, are we even aware that we gradually become insensitive to touch and to the exploring of our surroundings?

We give the term “leisure” a mistaken definition or meaning. Many people think that it means to do nothing. Thus, when we have free time for ourselves, we waste it in front of the television set, a video game console or the screen of some computer. This way, we submerge ourselves into a reality that’s foreign to us. And, without even noticing, we become prisoners to stress.

### **Does nature aid in the fight against stress?**

The answer to this question is a definitive yes. Within the recommendations some doctors currently give out is to seek out contact with nature.

Remember your trips to the countryside. Surely you have noticed that once you leave the city behind, everything changes. The smells, sounds and landscape are all different. Your senses seem to awaken, and we perceive many things that we simply overlook on our day-to-day.

But beyond seeking contact with nature, there is a very valuable technique directed towards fighting stress: forest baths. This technique emerged in Japan, a country which possesses one of the most developed economies in the world. However, at the same time, it has one of the highest suicide rates among teenagers and people with illnesses (including death) in the population. This is most likely caused by overworking.

The technique involves reuniting with nature, be it a forest or an open field. The idea is to relax and leave aside the chaos in which we are submerged daily. This way, we reduce our levels of stress so that we may manage it better. Consider that taking a walk in a natural setting implies establishing a break from many of the stimuli which generate anguish.

### **The benefits of forest baths**

The most important benefit from forest baths is being able to connect with the universe through nature. Also, being able to adapt to stress better. Forest baths (whose Japanese term is *Shinrin Yoku*) offer other possibilities besides walking. You can, if you so want, hug a tree and experience the benefits of exchanging your bad vibes for the ones offered to you by the branches and trunk of that tree. Or you can drink an infusion with aromatic plants which contribute to your relaxation.

Nature helps you see the world from a different perspective. When you are stressed, it's because a part of your brain is overloaded. Forest baths diminish cerebral activity related to decision making and problem resolution. Instead, it activates areas of the brain associated with emotions, pleasure and creativity.

In order for forest baths to reduce your levels of stress, it's a must for you to dedicate enough time to it. Hurrying the experience along won't do any good. Remember that you're going to take advantage of goodness offered up to you by this contact with nature. Goodness which you can only obtain if you pay attention to each step you take.

Among other things, remember that you can also practice meditation as you walk. It's enough to be alert and keep your senses wide awake.

Putting some effort into filling yourself with good energy doesn't cost a dime. Nor does it take much effort at all. It's enough to open your mind as well as your heart. Recognize that you are part of this universe.

We all serve a function, we're all connected and each decision we make affects our surroundings. If we want tranquility, health and spiritual growth, let's start by regaining our contact with nature.

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