



## Spending Time Outdoors while Social Distancing

During these uncertain times, many of us are looking to the outdoors as a way to get out of the house, relieve stress, and maintain our health and well-being. Unfortunately, the popularity of outdoor activities has had the unintended effect of making it harder to find places to social distance, and has led to stricter guidelines for, and even closure of, some areas.

Here are ways in which you can safely spend time exercising outdoors. It is crucial that you incorporate these recommendations into your outdoor experience while following directives in your particular state or region for minimizing the spread of the novel coronavirus.

### Guidelines for the Trail

- 1. Avoid popular trails and greenways.**
  - a. Many people with limited to no outdoor experience are using these areas heavily, making them ineffective choices for social distancing.
  - b. Parking lots in commonly used areas can be hazardous as crowds gather and surfaces may become unsafe to touch.
  
- 2. Avoid weekends and other times of heavy traffic.**
  
- 3. Stay local.**
  - a. This strategy minimizes travel time and stops.
  - b. A long drive makes it harder to rearrange plans if you arrive and the area is crowded.
  
- 4. Consider a solo adventure.**
  - a. Group gatherings increase dramatically the chance of spreading the virus.
  - b. This is a great opportunity to perform meditation or engage in forest bathing (Shinrin-yoku), the intentional practice of connecting with nature and surrounding yourself with the energy of the natural world. Here are some resources to enhance the experience:

<https://time.com/5259602/japanese-forest-bathing/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/08/forest-bathing-japanese-practice-in-west-wellbeing>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/07/17/536676954/forest-bathing-a-retreat-to-nature-can-boost-immunity-and-mood>

5. **Limit your group to the people with whom you are already practicing social distancing in your home.**
6. **If you do encounter people on the trail, maintain social distancing practices.**
  - a. Be vocal, ensure that they are aware of you and your family.
  - b. Keep pets restrained.
  - c. Make room for people to pass while maintaining a minimum distance of six feet.
  - d. Be pleasant and brief.
7. **Prepare children for success.**
  - a. Establish and review guidelines and set clear expectations before leaving home.
  - b. Make them the focus of the experience.
  - c. Set easily achievable goals.
    - i. End this experience on a high note so they will want to do it again.
    - ii. If they are tired before you get to where you are going, they will be miserable on the way back.
  - d. Have them wear clothes that can get dirty (bring a change of clothes, shoes, and a towel) and allow them to have some uninhibited play.
  - e. Focus on the quality of the time, not the amount.
    - i. Be ready to turn back if needed.
    - ii. Carry items to enhance the experience: Art pads or journals, magnifying glasses, and binoculars are a few examples.
  - f. Avoid meeting up with other children.
    - i. You will be constantly reminding them to maintain social distancing guidelines, creating a negative experience.
8. **At the end of your experience, wash or sanitize hands before getting back in your vehicle.**

## **How to Find a Trail**

If you are not familiar with a lot of the trails in your local area, chances are the trails you do know will be busy. Use or download one of the many apps that show trails near you. The following apply to the entire country:

<https://www.alltrails.com/>

<https://www.hikingproject.com/>

<https://discovertheforest.org/>

Other websites focus on specific locations and can be found with an online search. These are for Virginia and the southeast:

<https://www.roanokeoutside.com/land/hiking/> (for those in the Roanoke Valley)

<https://www.hikingupward.com/>

## **Benefits of Time Spent Outdoors**

In addition to offering exercise and physical movement, spending time in wild or forested areas can offer these advantages:

- Reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and anger
- Increasing energy, creativity, concentration, and memory
- Improving sleep
- Boosting the immune system
- Improving cardiovascular and metabolic health
- Inducing psychologically calming effects
- Accelerating recovery from illness

We hope that these resources and suggestions enhance your own physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual well-being.

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