

## TREES FOR A HEALTHY NEW YEAR

As we begin a new year, many people commit to a healthier lifestyle. Working out, eating healthy, and positive thinking are all examples of actions we take to help us achieve good health. However, did you know trees can have positive physical and psychological effects?

Broad-scale research by the U.S. Forest Service, published in 2014, estimates that trees' remove less than 1 percent of pollution from the air. Do not take this to mean that they do not help, however. In purifying only that small amount of air, trees prevent 670,000 cases of acute respiratory symptoms each year, save 850 human lives, and save approximately \$6.8 billion in health costs. The greatest impact on health was found to be in urban areas. Imagine the benefits if more trees were incorporated into urban landscapes. For more information, check out the research publication at ([http://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/jrnl/2014/nrs\\_2014\\_nowak\\_001.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/jrnl/2014/nrs_2014_nowak_001.pdf)).

In Japan, some people practice Shinrin Yoku, or “Forest Bathing”, in which one spends a short time, fully clothed, in a wooded area, focusing on what they see, hear, smell, and feel. A small study of people who committed to this practice found that they had significantly boosted their immune systems and lowered their stress levels, with lasting effects (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2793341/>).

If forest bathing sounds daunting, don't worry, sometimes an even smaller tree experience can make a difference. According to an article by Rebecca Clay for the American Psychological Association, that can be accessed at <http://www.apa.org/monitor/apr01/greengood.aspx>, research shows that even photos of forests can boost a person's mood, and patients in hospitals who had a view of trees through their window healed faster with fewer complications. The article sites more research where children with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder showed fewer symptoms after being exposed to tiny green settings-sometimes not much more than a small area of grass and a single tree.

So just remember, with trees' ability to combat stress, encourage exercise, and help strengthen the immune system, they can be a helpful tool in achieving your health-related New Year's resolutions!