



# Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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## The Healthy Journey

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### COVID-19 update

COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) is a highly contagious respiratory illness. Older adults and people with underlying medical conditions have higher risks for COVID-19 complications. Please consider protecting yourself and your community by:

Don't get close to other people

- Avoiding exposure by staying at least 6 feet away from other people
- Avoid gatherings of more than a few people
- Avoid contact with people who are sick
- Isolate yourself from everyone if you have symptoms such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing

- Cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze to avoid the spread of germs
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and frequently used areas
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

News about COVID-19 changes every day. Information is available from reputable sources, such as:

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC;** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>)

**The National Institutes of Health (NIH;** <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus>)

**The World Health Organization (WHO;** <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>)

**Stop the Spread of Germs (CDC;** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs.pdf>)

### Nature's Impact on Health and Wellbeing

By Allison Udris M.S. LCPC

#### How does nature affect health?

Research suggests that spending time in nature is linked to physical and mental health benefits. For example, spending time in nature...

- Improves your heart health, circulation, immunity, and memory
- Reduces your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood glucose, inflammation, and risk of stroke
- Benefits your mental health by raising self-esteem and lowering stress, fatigue, anxiety, and depression
- Improves your physical fitness
- Helps you connect with your neighbors
- Increases your exposure to sunlight, which boosts levels of vitamin D in your body

Some studies have shown that hospital patients with nature views may recover more quickly from surgery. It may

also reduce the need for pain medication. Even having a view of nature from inside your home can benefit your health.

Spending time in nature improves your physical and mental health

#### Greenspace in Baltimore City

Baltimore City has many parks, water sources, trails, and gardens. Baltimore City Recreation and Parks operates over 4,600 acres of parkland and 1,200 acres of urban wilderness parkland, 11 city farms, and 2.8 million trees. Here are some examples of Baltimore's greenspaces.

**Parks.** Canton Waterfront Park, Carroll Park, Chinquapin Run Park, Clifton Park, Cylburn Arboretum, Druid Hill Park, Farring Baybrook Park, Federal Hill, Fort McHenry, Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park, Hanlon Park, Herring Run Park, Middle Branch/Reedbird Park, Patterson Park, Riverside Park, Roosevelt Park, Wyman Park Dell

For example, Patterson Park amenities include walking, jogging, and biking paths; swimming pool; lake; athletic fields; basketball and tennis courts; ice rink; dog park; pagoda; picnic areas; pavilions; playgrounds; city farms garden; and Audubon center. Visit the Pagoda (Sundays from 12-6PM, mid-April through mid-October) to receive a free guide map for the Patterson Park Tree Walk. The Tree Walk is a self-guided tour where visitors can see the various species of trees inside the park. In addition, the Patterson Park Audubon Center connects people to nature, especially birds and other wildlife, by offering free and low-cost programs such as volunteer opportunities, bird walks, and workshops. To learn more, visit <https://patterson.audubon.org/> or call 410-558-2473. Additionally, many events and volunteer opportunities are held throughout the year at Patterson Park. Please visit <https://pattersonpark.com/parkcalendar> for a list of upcoming park events.

**Trails.** Cylburn Arboretum Woodland Walking Trails, Leakin Park Trail, Gwynns Falls Trail, Jones Falls Trail, Herring Run Trail, Stony Run Trail.

For example, The *Gwynns Falls Trail* is a 15-mile urban hiking and biking trail through the Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park urban greenway in west and southwest Baltimore City. The trail connects several Baltimore neighborhoods with tributaries, streams, and parklands. Visitors can walk, jog, bike, or hike the trail. There are several picnic spots, as well as opportunities for birdwatching and fishing. Additionally, a free *Gwynns Falls Trail App* is available on the Apple App store for navigating the trail.

**Water.** Canton Waterfront Park, Chinquapin Run Park, Fort McHenry, Fredrick Douglass-Isaac Myers Maritime Park, Harbor Island Walk, Inner Harbor Amphitheater, Lake Montebello, Lake Roland, Tide Point, Patterson Park Boat Lake, Waterfront Promenade (paved 7-mile walkway along the Inner Harbor from Fort McHenry to Canton Waterfront Park), West Shore Park.

For example, Lake Montebello is a short walk from Herring Run Park. Amenities in the Lake Montebello and Herring Run area include paved and dirt trails for walking, jogging, and biking; sledding spots; birdwatching and group bird walks; playgrounds; basketball court; picnic areas; reservoir loop; and exercise stations. Friends of Herring Run offers programs such as bike tours (bikes are provided for trail rides; suggested \$5 donation) and group birdwatching walks (free). Additionally, there are various



volunteer opportunities and family events held at the park each year. For more information about the event calendar, visit Friends of Herring Run at <https://www.friendsofherringrun.org/> or call 410-227-2970.

**Other nature spaces.** Baltimore Museum of Art Sculpture Garden, Baltimore Rowing and Water Resource Center, Carrie Murray Nature Center, Cylburn Arboretum Mansion & Vollmer Visitor Center, Howard Peter Rawlings Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Patterson Park

Pagoda, Sherwood Gardens.

For example, Druid Hill Park is home to the *Howard Peter Rawlings Conservatory and Botanical Gardens* (3100 Swann Dr, Baltimore, MD 21217). Rawlings Conservatory is a great way to experience nature while staying comfortable indoors. The conservatory has 5 indoor greenhouse rooms and a half-acre outdoor garden with flower beds. Public programs for adults exist such as the “Plants and People” series and free guided tours. The conservatory is open year-round; the hours of operation are from 10am-4pm Wednesday through Sunday. Admission to the conservatory is a suggested \$5 cash donation. For more information, please visit <http://www.rawlingsconservatory.org/> or call 410-396-0008.

### How to use greenspace for health

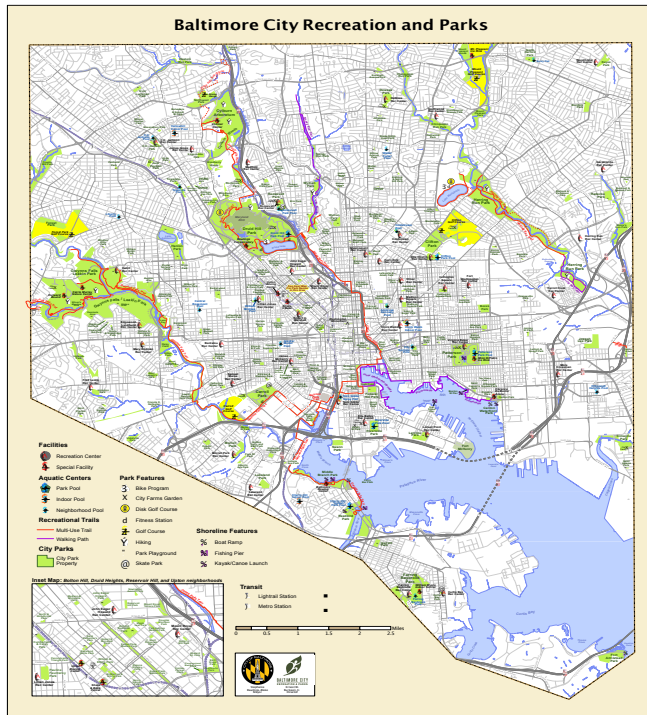
Here are some tips about gaining health benefits from Baltimore’s outdoor greenspaces.

**Aim for 2 hours per week in nature.** Any amount of time spent in nature can improve your health. Spending 2 hours per week outside can make a difference. This means spending only about **20 minutes per day!**



**Join a walking group.** Walking outside uses more muscle groups than walking on a flat surface or treadmill. Research suggests that walking groups improve blood pressure, cholesterol, heart rate, and physical functioning. Walking with a group fosters social connections, which can boost mood, lower stress, and fight symptoms of depression. Visit a website such as [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) to find walking or outdoor fitness groups in your area. If you are unable to join a group, try to walk with a family member, friend, neighbor, or pet.

**Try forest bathing.** Forest bathing, or *Shinrin-yoku* in Japanese, is a way to connect with nature by using all 5 senses. This practice lowers cortisol (a stress hormone), heart rate, and blood pressure. To practice forest bathing,



you can sit or walk mindfully in nature while using each sense to connect with the outdoors. For example, you can *touch* a tree's bark, *smell* a flower's fragrance, *taste* freshly grown produce, *see* a bird fly overhead, and *hear* water running down a stream.

**Participate in community farms and gardens.** The Baltimore City Farms in the Department of Recreation & Parks offers garden beds for rent to city residents. A garden manager is available on-site if you need advice or support. City Farms also offers educational programs and social activities for participants (cleanups, cook-outs, and potlucks). There are City Farms at Carroll, Clifton, Dewees, Druid Hill, Cimaglia, Leakin, Patterson, Rockrose, Roosevelt, Light Street @ Heath Street, and Heath Street @ Charles Street. For more information about participating in a city farm, please call (410) 396-4850 or visit <https://bcrp.baltimorecity.gov/special-programs/farms>.

If you have limited access to greenspace in your community or if the weather is uncooperative with outdoor activities, the following suggestions can help you enjoy nature's benefits indoors.

**Keep indoor houseplants.** Pollutants from contaminated ventilation systems, building materials, furnishings, and even cleaning products affect indoor air quality. Poor indoor air quality can lead to respiratory irritation and asthma. Houseplants improve air quality and eliminate toxins. Some of the best air purifying houseplants include the Boston fern, peace lily, ficus, English ivy, and golden pothos. It is recommended to

have two plants per 100 square feet of indoor space. Try to have at least one plant in every room.

**Surround yourself with color.** Decorate your home with nature's colors, such as blue and green. These colors can remind you of the outdoors and promote a sense of serenity and calm.

**Listen to nature sounds.** Use a white noise machine that mimics the sounds of waves, wind, or birds chirping. Use CDs or music downloads that play nature sounds. Nature sounds, even if they are artificial, are known to reduce stress.

**Plant a window garden.** Window views of nature can improve your sense of well-being and positive mood. If the view from your window does not include any greenery, you can create your own by placing plants on your windowsill or by planting a window garden with seasonal flowers or greenery. If you do not have a green thumb, you can display pictures of nature in your home to view.

**Create an herb garden.** If you do not have the space for an outdoor garden, a small indoor herb garden is a great option. You can use small pots on windowsills to grow fresh herbs. Some herbs don't need soil and pots to grow; basil, oregano, peppermint, sage, and thyme are examples of herbs that grow when a fresh cutting is placed in a glass of water. This is an excellent way to grow herbs in the colder months. Fresh or dried herbs can be used as a healthy seasoning for your meals.



### References and resources

<https://bcrp.baltimorecity.gov/>

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/naturesbenefits.htm>

<https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/08/09/18/improving-health-and-wellness-through-access-to-nature>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3230460/>

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

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>



## Balancing enjoying nature with COVID-19 risk

During COVID-19, please enjoy the outdoors responsibly. If you decide to spend time outside, please consider these precautions to keep yourself healthy:

- Keep a safe distance from others by staying at least 6 feet away
- Avoid large groups
- Visit parks or outdoor areas during off-times, when they are less likely to be crowded

- Wash your hands before and after your outdoor activity
- Bring hand sanitizer with you
- Note that during COVID-19, many public restrooms at parks may be closed. Be prepared and use the restroom before you visit the park.
- If you feel sick, please stay home!
- Some public parks may be temporarily closed to due to social distancing guidelines.



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## Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.