

# HOW SUNSHINE CAN BRIGHTEN YOUR LIFE

Most of us have spent more time indoors than we'd like over the past year. But as summer approaches, it's important to start getting some sun.

This season carries a lot of warm memories for people—school breaks, family vacations, lazy days by the pool—but there's more to the story.

Read on to find the three ways the sun can help us feel better, reenergize, and reconnect.

## IMPROVE HEALTH

While it's true prolonged exposure to the sun can cause problems for human health—burns, eye damage, skin cancer, heat exhaustion—a little bit of it can go a long way toward fighting all sorts of physical problems.

This is thanks in large part to vitamin D: an essential hormone our bodies produce in response to sunlight. Here are just a few things vitamin D may contribute to:<sup>1</sup>

- Supporting the immune system
- Keeping bones strong
- Potentially reducing flu risk

Without vitamin D, your body is at a higher risk for developing a number of adverse problems. You can make up potential deficits through vitamin D-enriched food, supplements, and—of course—sunlight (but don't forget that getting sun should be done in moderation.)



## IMPROVE SLEEP

The human body has a natural cycle known as a circadian rhythm—and light exposure correlates with how well that rhythm stays in sync.<sup>2</sup>

A key benefit of maintaining a healthy circadian rhythm is the release of melatonin—a hormone that your body naturally produces to aid in sleep when the light starts to dim.



This is one reason nighttime device usage is frowned upon. The later into the night we stare into our backlit phone, laptop, or TV screens, the less melatonin we get and the more our circadian rhythm takes a hit.

Regular exposure to sunlight throughout the day is one of the best ways to keep our natural sleep cycle in check. Advocating for sleep when the sun sets and waking when it rises may sound like an antiquated platitude, but some pieces of wisdom never change.

## IMPROVE MOOD

The sun's correlation with sleep is described above. And the more rested we are, the more control we typically have over emotional regulation.<sup>3</sup>

But that's just part of it. Sunlight also stimulates serotonin release.<sup>4</sup> Serotonin is commonly referred to as the happiness hormone, as it is one of the key culprits responsible for feelings of well-being.

Of course, another tried-and-true method for battling the blues, improving health, and sleeping well is exercise... so why not kill three birds with one stone by incorporating an outdoor walk into your daily routine? It may be just what the doctor ordered!



<sup>1</sup>Ware, Megan "What are the health benefits of vitamin D?" *Medical News Today*, 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Choi, J.H., Lee, B., Lee, J.Y. *et al.* "Relationship between Sleep Duration, Sun Exposure, and Serum 25-Hydroxyvitamin D Status: A Cross-sectional Study." *Scientific Reports*, 2020.

<sup>3</sup>Vandekerckhove, Marie and Wang, Yu-lin "Emotion, emotion regulation, and sleep: An intimate relationship." *US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health*, 2017.

<sup>4</sup>Osborn, Fiona "How Sunlight Affects Your Mood." *Total Wellness Magazine*, 2019.

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