



This week...

Cleanse Your Body with Forest Bathing

Spring Break is here! Although we are all in different parts of the province, our hope is that you are starting to see the first signs of Spring. In the spirit of boosting your health during your time off, we encourage you to try **forest bathing**.

What is forest bathing?

In British Columbia, we have been gifted with beautiful, plentiful trees in our outdoor playgrounds. We know how good being in nature can make us feel. The sounds of the forest, the scent of the trees, the sunlight playing through the leaves, the fresh, clean air — these things give us a sense of comfort.

The term forest bathing comes from the Japanese word **shinrin-yoku**. *Shinrin* in Japanese means 'forest', and *yoku* means 'bath'. So *shinrin-yoku* means bathing in the forest atmosphere or taking in the forest through our senses.¹

Closer to home, our First Peoples teach us that we are a part of nature. They know intuitively that forest bathing would help to balance us. However, with our more modern conveniences, we no longer have that close association with nature and, as a result, we are less healthy. Going back to nature, feeling the benefits of being a part of the land, takes conscious effort and planning.²

Forest bathing is not quite the same as an exercise activity like hiking or jogging. People of all levels of fitness can benefit from this practice. It is not quite meditation either, although it will bring you into the present moment, de-stress and relax you.

Why should I try forest bathing?

The calming benefits of spending time in nature are well documented. Check out this [blog by Vancouver's David Suzuki Foundation](#) that provides a good summary of its benefits, including decreased anxiety and a strengthened immune system. Japanese studies have shown that people who spend time in the forest inhale beneficial bacteria, plant-based essential oils, and negatively charged ions. The Association of Nature & Forest Therapy also provides a list of the many benefits including reduced blood pressure, increased energy, as well as the following findings:³

- Our levels of the **stress hormone cortisol will decrease** more from a walk in the forest than a walk in an urban setting.
- Forest bathing **increases our parasympathetic nervous system** activity which prompts rest, conserves energy and slows the heart rate while increasing intestinal and gland activity. To learn more about your parasympathetic nervous system, check out [this ReCharge article](#).
- Leisurely forest walks can also help **boost immune functioning**. The natural chemicals secreted by evergreen trees, collectively known as **phytoncides**, have been associated with improvements in our frontline immune defenders.
- Preliminary research even suggests **possible anti-cancer benefits**.
- Forest bathing **improves our mental performance, focus, creativity and mood**.

The Snuneymuxw First Nation also recognizes the benefits above, as well as:²

- Accelerated recovery from surgery or illness
- Increased energy level
- Improved sleep
- Deeper and clearer intuition
- Increased flow of energy
- Increased capacity to communicate with the land and its species
- Increased flow of eros/life force
- Deepening of friendships
- Overall increase in sense of happiness

Do I just walk in the forest?

Any time spent in nature provides benefits. To really experience a soothing and healthy boost, the key to unlocking the power of the forest is in the five senses. Try following this guide from *Time Magazine*:

*“Let nature enter through your ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands and feet. Listen to the birds singing and the breeze rustling in the leaves of the trees. Look at the different greens of the trees and the sunlight filtering through the branches. Smell the fragrance of the forest and breathe in the natural aromatherapy of **phytoncides**. Taste the freshness of the air as you take deep breaths. Place your hands on the trunk of a tree. Dip your fingers or toes in a stream. Lie on the ground. Drink in the flavor of the forest and release your sense of joy and calm. This is your sixth sense, a state of mind. Now you have connected with nature.”⁴*

Pay attention to what is **in motion**: birds flittering between trees, the wind dancing in the branches, even the water trickling down the rocks. Feel the temperature, the air, and the energy around you.

When it comes to reaching calmness and relaxation, there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution – it differs from person to person. It is important to find a place that is available and suits you. Do you prefer the deep, dark, damp forest or the more open countryside? Perhaps, you prefer a beach or enjoy observing the proximity of the trees. Try downloading the [All Trails app](#) on your phone to locate hiking trails in your area and explore somewhere new.

We wish you an enjoyable break and encourage you to make time to be in nature to restore your mood, energy and vitality!

If you would like to contribute, or have ideas about what you would like to see in the [ReFresh](#) series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Sources:

¹ [Hello BC | 5 Things You Didn’t Know About Shinrin-Yoku in BC](#)

² [Snuneymuxw | Forest Bathing Health Benefits](#)

³ [Time Magazine | Japanese Forest Bathing](#)

⁴ [Association of Nature and Forest Therapy | Science Agrees Nature is Good for You](#)

