

Talking Conservation

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NATURE'S HEALING POWER IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR WELLBEING

Part 2: Nature deficit disorder and the restorative power of nature

Earlier this year, I learned about nature-deficit disorder while listening to a radio talk by Erica Terblanche. She explained how children's disconnection from nature, outdoor play and environmental education impacts us all.

The restorative power of nature has always been revered for its beauty and tranquillity, but its revitalising power goes beyond mere aesthetics. It is well-documented that spending time in a natural environment:

- enhances physical, mental, and emotional well-being
- lowers blood pressure
- reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases
- boosts the immune system.

Activities such as hiking, walking, and gardening promote physical fitness and help combat obesity. Additionally, natural sunlight is a vital source of vitamin D, essential for bone health and immune function.

Nature's impact on mental health is profound. Studies have demonstrated that spending time in natural settings and green spaces can:

- reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress
- lower cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress
- improve cognitive function
- enhance attention, memory, and creativity
- support cognitive development and academic performance in children.

The emotional and psychological benefits of nature are equally compelling. Nature provides a sense of

peace and tranquility, offering a respite from the hustle and bustle of daily life. The restorative power of our natural world:

- fosters a sense of awe and wonder
- promotes positive emotions and overall well-being
- encourages mindfulness and presence, allowing individuals to disconnect from technology and reconnect with themselves
- expands social and community well-being.

Green spaces and parks serve as communal areas where people can socialise and foster a sense of belonging. Nature-based activities can promote environmental stewardship and collective responsibility for the natural world.

The solace found in the forests around Sedgefield, the exhilaration of a mountain hike, the serenity of a stroll along the beach or the estuary or the joy of your garden, highlight the appeal of nature's restorative power. These personal connections to nature often inspire a lifelong appreciation and commitment to preserving the environment.

The restorative power of nature is undeniable. From physical health benefits to mental and emotional well-being, nature offers a holistic approach to improving quality of life. As urbanisation and technology continue to shape our world, it is essential to prioritise, expand, and protect natural spaces and our commons. This can ensure that future generations continue to enjoy the healing power of nature.