

Often when we talk about health we are referring specifically to a physical state of well-being. When we fail to honour the equally important mental and emotional counterparts of the healthy body, the healthy mind, we run the risk of failing to notice when we are becoming overburdened, making the healthy mind more vulnerable. Without regular attention to the state of our emotional well-being we can be at risk of disconnecting from the things that bring us joy, leading to increased feelings of emotional distress, or feelings of depression, anxiety, or general unease. Learning to attend to the state of our mental health (our ability to meaningfully participate in, enjoy, and feel in control of our lives) can be tricky business and requires that we learn to listen to, and take of ourselves in a new way. As such, incorporating regular and meaningful opportunities to tune ourselves up mentally and emotionally is critical.

Each day during my lunch hour I try to take a half hour walk. By mid-day my tummy is hungry for lunch, my body is hungry for movement, and my mind – still processing the experiences of my morning clients - is hungry for peace. I look forward to my noon hour walks. By 1pm I am ready to meet my afternoon head on. My own experiences, reports from my clients, and countless research studies consistently show that access to green spaces and contact with nature (such as hiking) can be very helpful in restoring of a sense of balance for those who struggle with the management of stress, combatting depression and anxiety, or promoting feelings of wellbeing overall. Some research in this area has suggested that even viewing natural settings can be helpful.

Research has shown that access to green spaces including nature, trees, and wildlife is useful in managing depression, ADHD especially in children and adults, can aid in the management of stress, and is useful in the promotion of overall wellbeing. Hike Ontario (<http://hikeontario.com/>) is an excellent resource that details province wide hiking information and services, and outlines the benefits of hiking including why hiking, green spaces, and trees are beneficial to mental health. Locally, The Canadian Mental Health Association offers Mood Walks (a special program affiliated with Hike Ontario). For more information on CMHA Elgin's Mood Walks program call 519-633-1781.

The benefits of accessing the natural environment are best felt when contact is regular, and meaningful, and when accessed in doses that you can physically tolerate well. Why not make the most of this pleasant weather while you can, before you reach a breaking point?