

The Physical Benefits of Camping



A recent survey reported that more North Americans are discovering the benefits of camping and spending time outdoors. According to the 2020 North American Camping Report, there are more than 94.5 million camper households throughout North America. In the United States, 48.2 million households reported that they camped at least once during 2020, including 10.1 million households who said they went camping for the first time (Cairn, 2020). With the increased number of campers, one might wonder, what's the draw to the outdoors?

Camping provides a host of benefits. Simply put, camping is good for you, both in body and mind. Benefits include relationship building, opportunities to learn and develop new skills, unplugging and getting away from screens, connecting with nature, stress reduction, and increasing physical fitness. The fitness benefits of camping are well documented. Research suggests that physical activity in the outdoors and feelings of connection to nature enhance psychological health and well-being. Activities such as walking in forests and participating in outdoor activities have been shown to enhance mood and focus, and increase attention and cognitive capacity. Additionally, significant improvements in self-esteem occur

with physical activity in the great outdoors (Lawton et al., 2017). The physical demands of backpacking, setting up tents and making camp, hiking, fishing, and exploring nature certainly count as exercise which contributes to our overall health and well-being. Outdoor physical activity has been linked to a decrease in depressive thoughts and sleeping under the stars can help promote our natural circadian rhythm, which is a foundation for high quality sleep and health (National Park Service, 2019).

With all of these health benefits, why wouldn't you want to go camping? Perhaps you are new to camping and feel a bit intimidated. Start small and work your way up. To ease into it, consider a camping trip close to home. Pitch a tent in your backyard or someplace close to where you live. Another idea would be to plan a backpacking trip close to home. These are great for overnights where you can pack light and carry what you need with you. Campouts close to home take less planning and allow for scheduling flexibility. As you explore areas and find hiking trails close to where you live, you may discover a location you didn't realize would become your new favorite place to camp. As you become more comfortable with camping, you can branch out and discover the beauty of state and national parks or one of many campgrounds across the country.

When you consider all of the amazing benefits to your health and life in general, whether you go camping in your back yard or in a campground, time spent camping is time well spent!

Additional Resources:

- A Beginner's Guide to Camping for the First Time
- How to Camp

References:

- Cairn Consulting Group. (2020, October 1). *The 2020*

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