

By Lacy Wolff, ERS Health Promotion Administrator



Our world is fast paced and filled with modern day conveniences like cars, air conditioning and mobile devices that buffer us from the natural world. Yet, there is something incredibly soothing about getting out into nature. There's nothing like feeling the dirt or grass between your toes, listening to the birds chirp and the sound of rustling leaves as the wind blows through the trees. Taking in the smells of rich soil, flowers blooming, or rain can feel like we are coming home, back to where we (humans) are meant to be!

It won't come as a shock to most people that being outdoors can improve health and well-being. But what you may find surprising is that being outdoors creates such positive changes in the human body that some doctors are now prescribing the outdoors for high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, Type II diabetes, and more. Much like exercise, the outdoors has a wide array of benefits that can improve health, such as reducing stress and feelings of anxiety and depression. Other benefits include improving eyesight, lowering blood pressure and heart rate, increasing Vitamin D, improving sleep, and even reducing inflammation, which promotes faster healing and reduction of pain.

The most popular screen savers for our computers are beautiful pictures of nature. Unfortunately, most of us spend more time looking at our screens than we do out the window. Often we feel glued to technology and struggle to find the time to get outdoors even for short periods of time. This month, as we focus on the health benefits of being outside, here are a few ways to fill your prescription for the outdoors and get closer to nature:

- Take a sunrise stroll. The sunrise during the month of June in Texas, depending on where you are located, is typically between 6-6:45 a.m. The feeling of the cool(er) air and the changing of the light can be a wonderful way to bring in the new day. Don't worry about how many steps you take, or how fast you go, just enjoy the start of a new day!
- Go out for a picnic in a local park or by a lake or river. Texas has some incredible green spaces to explore. This is a fun way to spend quality time with your family. You can even consider a "technology free" event. Picnics in the outdoors create long lasting memories and can make something we normally do like eating, a novel and fun activity.
- Go for a walk. Prefer to have company? Make the new **ERS Walk & Talk podcast** your new companion for a 20- to 30minute walk, and listen to a conversation about health and life with a state employee, health expert, or leader that has an inspiring message to help keep us moving!
- Learn more about what the Texas State Parks have to offer through our webinar featuring State Park Director, Rodney Franklin. In Texas, our state parks offer endless opportunities to get out in nature for the day, or even longer on a camping adventure! Learn more and enroll through the **ERS Wellness Events Calendar**.

Consider the small, simple things you can do to get outside more with your family—from bike rides to strolls. The little things add up and can make a big impact over the course of our lifetime.



If you want to make us aware of other resources to help Texans spend more time outside, please share them with us at [wellness@ers.texas.gov](mailto:wellness@ers.texas.gov).

