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Enjoy Nature and Improve Your Health

From a stroll through a park to a day spent playing in the river, exposure to nature has been linked to a host of benefits, including improved attention, lower stress and better mood.

The American Psychological Association reports that getting out in nature can have positive benefits to your physical and mental health. This is a great time of year to get outdoors and plant a garden, enjoy a nature walk with your kids, or simply relax and breathe in some fresh air. In doing so, you might enjoy some of the following benefits:

1. Spending time in nature is linked to both cognitive benefits and improvements in mood, mental health and emotional well-being.
2. Feeling connected to nature can produce similar benefits to well-being, regardless of how much time one spends outdoors.
3. Both green spaces and blue spaces (aquatic environments) produce well-being benefits. More remote and biodiverse spaces may be particularly helpful, though even urban parks and trees can lead to positive outcomes.

Source: [Nurtured by nature \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org) , American Psychological Association



Making Fruits and Vegetables the Easy Choice!

May 21 is Eat More Fruits and Vegetables day. We know a healthy eating pattern including fruits and vegetables can help to lower risks of developing chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. Here are a few tips for making fruits and vegetables the easy choice!

Choose to make half your plate fruits and vegetables. The rest of your plate should be one-quarter grains and one-quarter protein foods with low-fat dairy on the side.

Choose a variety of colors. The colors in fruit and vegetables are not just to make them look pretty. Fruit and vegetable colors are complex and those colors pack a healthy punch in reducing the risk of developing various chronic diseases. Try to eat a rainbow of colors each day.

Choose whole fruits and vegetables over juice. Children and adults eat most of their fruits and vegetables in the form of fruit juice, which can contain added sugars and make it higher in calories. Choosing whole fruits and vegetables provides fiber, less added sugar, vitamins, and minerals.

Choose to make fruits and vegetables exciting. Create a fruit and veggie contest. Making fruits and vegetables part of a child's healthy eating pattern establishes positive behaviors early. Children learn from watching you. Try having a fruit and veggie contest once a week. It can be a simple game of name five blue fruits! The prize could be choosing the fruit for dessert tonight.

Sources: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>; Texas A&M AgriLife Extension news release

Make Some Fruit Kabobs and Eat a Rainbow Today

Choose fruits with a variety of colors and textures. Try to avoid fruits that turn brown or mushy quickly. Some great choices are strawberries, blueberries, tangerines, kiwi, and cantaloupe.

There is no cooking required. Just alternate colors and place the prepped fruit chunks on skewers. Then cover tightly and chill. They should stay fresh in the refrigerator for up to 12 hours.

1. Prep the fruit by cutting into slices, wedges or chunks.
2. Thread fruit onto skewers and refrigerate until eating.

These are easy to make and a great way to get your kids involved in the kitchen. You can serve them as a side dish or a snack. They are even delicious with a little fruit dip or peanut butter.





Mothers' treat yourself to some mindful meditation for a stress free Mother's Day!

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

What are some examples of mindfulness exercises?

There are many simple ways to practice mindfulness. Some examples include:

- **Pay attention.** It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience your environment with all of your senses — touch, sound, sight, smell and taste.
- **Live in the moment.** Try to take in each moment and find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself.** Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.
- **Focus on your breathing.** When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.

You can also try more structured mindfulness exercises, such as:

- **Body scan meditation.** Lie on your back with your legs extended and arms at your sides, palms facing up. Focus your attention slowly and deliberately on each part of your body, in order, from toe to head or head to toe. Be aware of any sensations, emotions or thoughts associated with each part of your body.
- **Sitting meditation.** Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap. Breathing through your nose, focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. If physical sensations or thoughts interrupt your meditation, note the experience and then return your focus to your breath.
- **Walking meditation.** Find a quiet place 10 to 20 feet in length, and begin to walk slowly. Focus on the experience of walking, being aware of the sensations of standing and the subtle movements that keep your balance. When you reach the end of your path, turn and continue walking, maintaining awareness of your sensations.

Simple mindfulness exercises can be practiced anywhere and anytime. Research indicates that engaging your senses outdoors is especially beneficial. Try one of these mindful exercises today.

Source: [Mindfulness exercises - Mayo Clinic](#)





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Greek Yogurt Banana and Blueberry Pancakes

1 Banana mashed, plus more for topping
 ¼ cup nonfat plain Greek yogurt
 ½ cup gluten-free rolled oats
 1 medium egg
 1 tablespoon unsweetened almond milk
 ½ teaspoon baking powder
 1 teaspoon coconut extract
 ½ cup blueberries fresh or frozen



1. Wash hands and clean cooking area. Pre-heat skillet or griddle to medium-high heat.
2. Mash bananas until completely smooth. Combine all ingredients except blueberries and pour into a spouted measuring cup.
3. Spray cooking spray over skillet and pour batter. Pour just enough to make a small ball and flatten into a round pancake using a small spoon.
4. Cook until edges are set and bubbles begin to form in the middle, about 3 minutes. Use a spatula to flip and cook another 2-3 minutes.
5. Top with sliced bananas and blueberries and enjoy!

