Ecohealth

What's in a Green Space that makes us feel so good?

Features in Green Spaces: Trees, woodlands, meadows, lakes, rivers, streams, scenic views, plants, birds, ponds, gardens, and wildlife

Types of Green Spaces: Urban and rural parks, conservation areas, community and home gardens, farmland, green roofs, cemeteries, multi-use trails, sportsfields, beaches, playgrounds, etc.

What is Ecohealth?

Ecohealth is the relationship between human and environmental health.

ECOSYSTEM
Forests
Wetlands
Water
Soil
Plants
Animals

BENEFITS
Clean air & water
Food & medicines
Important natural & wildlife habitat
Less pollution, drought & heat
Less mental anxiety
More social interactions
More opportunity for physical activity

HEALTHY PEOPLE
Improved mental & physical wellbeing
Livable communities

We rely on nature for multiple benefits for both a healthy environment and healthy people.

SOME CHALLENGES

ADHD affects **5-10%** of Canadian Children

Nearly **23%** of Canadians report a high degree of **LIFE STRESS**

Current levels of AIR POLLUTION lead to:
3,550 HOSPITALIZATIONS
1,300 PREMATURE DEATHS
Each YEAR in Toronto

2/3 of Canadians are Vitamin D Deficient

9 MILLION+ Canadians suffer from some form of **DIABETES**

Every **7 MINUTES** in Canada, someone dies from **Heart Disease** or **Stroke**

Climate Change Affects Natural Environments and Human Health

Expected human health impacts include:
- Vector-borne diseases (West Nile virus and Lyme disease)
- Extreme weather impacts (Injury and illness due to flooding)
- Temperature related illness (heat stress, hypothermia)
- Air-quality effects (Cardiopulmonary diseases, asthma)
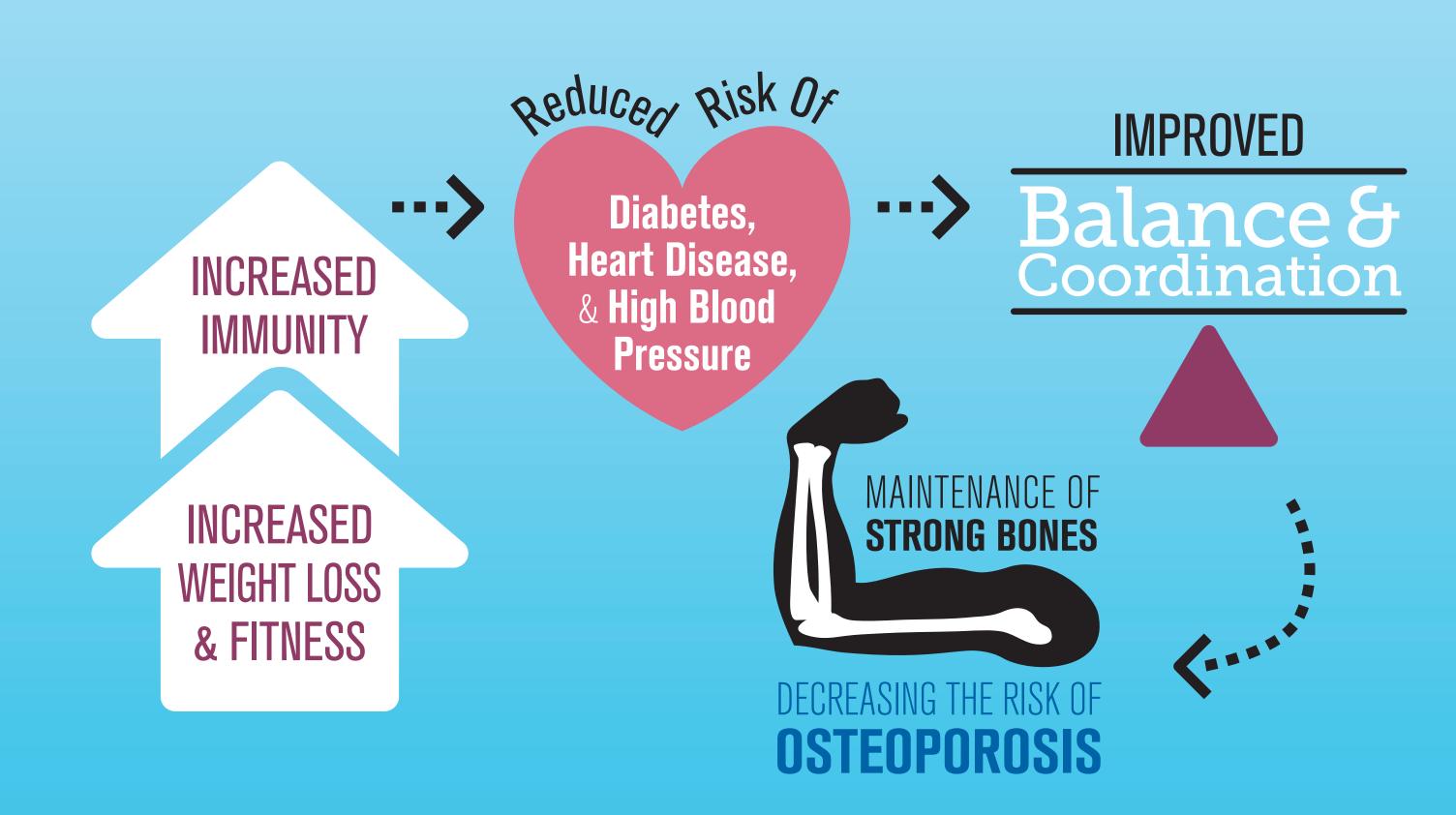- Water and food contamination

Better Physical Health

Living Near Trees & Green Space Has Benefits:

People who live in neighbourhoods with a higher density of trees on their streets report significantly higher health perception and less cardio-metabolic conditions.
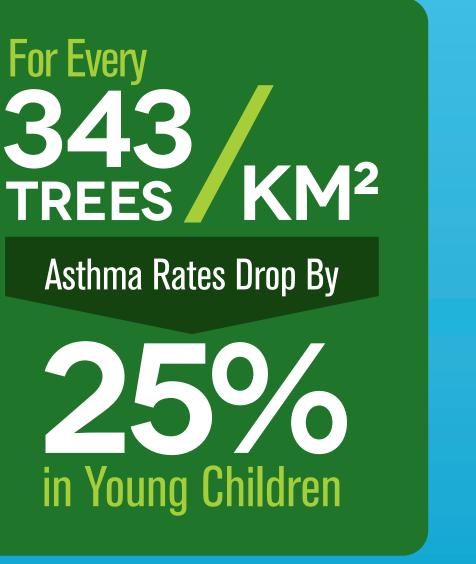
Trees help to improve air quality and combat climate change. Over 80 years, the average Canadian tree absorbs 200 kg of carbon dioxide – plus ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, fine particulate matter and sulphur dioxide.

Walking outside has been proven to provide physical health benefits such as:

INCREASED IMMUNITY

INCREASED WEIGHT LOSS & FITNESS

Reduced Risk Of Diabetes, Heart Disease, & High Blood Pressure

IMPROVED Balance & Coordination

MAINTENANCE OF **STRONG BONES**

DECREASING THE RISK OF **OSTEOPOROSIS**

Keeping Cool:
1 TREE Has the Cooling Effect of **10 Air Conditioners**

Trees, green roofs, and other green infrastructure reduce the demand for heating and cooling by reflecting light and heat, releasing water vapour into the air through transpiration and providing shade.

For Every **343 TREES / KM²** Asthma Rates Drop By **25%** in Young Children
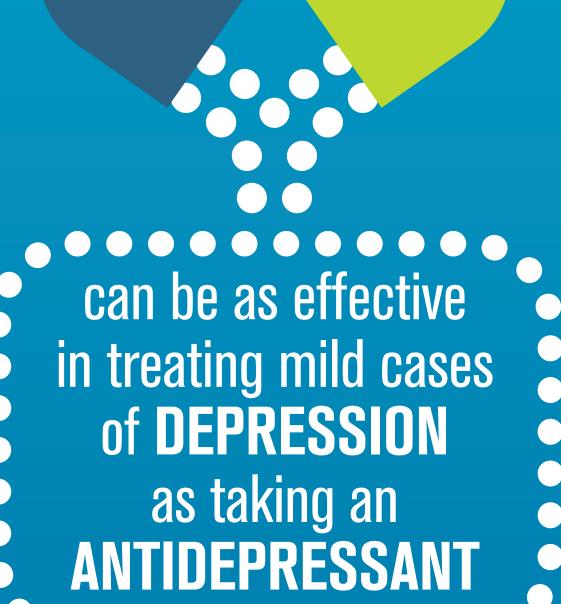
Reduce Risk of Chronic Diseases:
Green spaces reduce human exposure to air pollutants, thereby reducing risk factors for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Better Mental Health

Contact with nature (including trees, lakes, rivers, wildlife, blue skies) can provide stress relief, reduce brain fatigue, enhance the five senses, and improve memory, mood, positive thinking, decision-making ability, mental sharpness, creativity, and attention span.

Regular Use Of Natural Areas For **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** Can Reduce The Risk Of Mental Health Problems By **50%**

A **DAILY WALK** in **NATURE** can be as effective in treating mild cases of **DEPRESSION** as taking an **ANTIDEPRESSANT**

Five Things You Can Do

1. **COLLABORATE** across sectors and disciplines (e.g. public health, planning, parks, watershed management, academia) to build awareness and influence the protection and enhancement of green space by highlighting the benefits to human health.

2. **ADVOCATE** for strengthened green space policies that support healthy communities e.g. provision of shade, heat reduction, improved air quality, active transportation, biodiversity conservation and access to green space.

3. **PROMOTE** equitable access to green space with a focus on increasing access to vulnerable populations (e.g. seniors, children and people living on low income).

4. **INFLUENCE** official plans, watershed plans, strategies and other policies to protect and enhance green space.

5. **SHARE** information about health evidence for the protection and/or enhancement of green space.

Who is EcoHealth Ontario?

ecohealth-ontario.on.ca

EcoHealth Ontario is a collaborative of public health, environmental, planning, parks & education sectors who:

- Raise awareness of the public health benefits of a healthy & sustainable environment
- Build a common vision around ecohealth
- Influence policy
- Develop and share ecohealth research, information, and outreach tools

EcoHealth Ontario gratefully acknowledges the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Forests Ontario and our Steering Committee members for their generous support of our work.

EcoHealth Ontario Steering Committee
- Conservation Ontario
- Community of Practice in Ecosystem Approaches to Health, Ontario Node
- Credit Valley Conservation
- Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto
- Forests Ontario
- Ontario Professional Planners Institute
- Ontario Public Health Association
- Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto and Region Conservation
- York Region Community and Health Services

Research
Collaboration
EcoHealth ONTARIO
Outreach
Policy

Selected Sources:
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- Zupancic et al. (2015) Green City: Why Nature Matters to Health – An Evidence Review. Toronto Public Health.
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