

The Wellness Express™



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The Health Benefits of Moving Naturally

Presented by: Total Health Systems

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Introduction

Most of us live in an urban environment designed for comfort and convenience, an environment shaped by certain technologies, tools and transportation options that dictates how we move through the world from day to day. Some of our greatest achievements in modern living, though, have made it more challenging for us to connect with the natural world and realize our true health potential. Many of us no longer use the full scope of physical abilities that nature endowed us with and this loss of function has affected our collective spine, joint and overall health. Your chiropractor understands the importance of you moving your body's joints and limbs through all their various ranges of motion and he or she can work with you to rediscover the natural health heritage to which you are entitled.

"Green Exercise": Description & Principles

Green exercise is the name given to physical activity performed in nature. Both physical activity and exposure to nature affect health in a positive way. A 2005 study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Health Research* concludes that there are distinct synergistic health benefits that



occur when these unique factors are combined and that green exercise has important environmental and public health consequences.¹ A 2007 study published by the same authors in the *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* notes that green exercise (including such things as walking, cycling, boating, and certain conservation activities) helps boost self-esteem and reduces anger, confusion, depression and anxiety.²

Certain principles govern the performance of green exercise, or help to define it, including the principles of:

- 1) Adaptivity (the movements performed are dictated by environmental demands);
- 2) Practicality (the movements performed are useful in many different life situations that require a physical response);
- 3) Universality (the movements performed could be part of every human's life experience, regardless of gender or age);

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Exercise of the Week

Push Ups on Exercise Ball

Difficulty: Moderate to Advanced

(Consult your chiropractor before engaging in this or any other exercise.)

Start: Assume push-up position with hands on ball, fingers pointing toward floor. Hands should be positioned directly under shoulders and body should be in a straight line from ankles to ears.

Exercise: Keeping torso perfectly straight, slowly lower yourself to ball. Pause just before chest touches ball. If your upper body strength allows, push yourself back up to start position. If upper body strength is lacking, let chest come all way down to ball, then come off ball to return to start position. Repeat 5-15 times.



- 4) Efficiency (the movements performed are safe and skillful); and
- 5) Vitality (the movements performed can be used in times of emergency to ensure safety).

Exercise performed according to green exercise principles is intended to improve your strength, fitness, mood and physical, mental and spiritual health.

Natural Skills & Movements

Natural skills and movements can be divided into two principle categories: Movements that involve locomotion and movements that involve manipulation. Walking, running, crawling, jumping, swimming and climbing are all examples of locomotive skills, whereas key manipulative skills or movements include catching, carrying, lifting and throwing, among others. Our ancestors had to be adept at many of these natural skills, as they used them in their day to day lives. Today, few people, except for children, engage in this wide range of activities, to the detriment of our musculoskeletal well-being. Inactivity is a major factor in reduced joint range of motion and joint health, including spine function and health.

The Restorative Power of Nature

Performing natural skills in the natural world is a powerful way to combat or prevent chronic musculoskeletal problems but simply spending *time* in nature is, by itself, an effective way to develop better health. Perhaps not surprisingly, a study published in the journal *Environment and Behavior* reports that the restorative effects

arising from experiences in nature are greater than those arising from vacation experiences in urban environments or situations involving simple passive relaxation.³



Engaging in active play in the natural world is a powerful way to restore physical health, but green exercise positively affects mental health too. According to a 2010 study published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology*, green exercise helps significantly boost mood, especially when performed in the presence of water. This study also noted that the mentally ill showed the greatest improvements in self-esteem among all study participants participating in green exercise and that the environment provides an important health service.⁴

Green exercise is an effective way to re-establish a connection with the natural world that, for many of us, has been lost from years of sedentary, urban living. Performing ancient skills in a natural setting can improve all facets of health and remind us of our inherent strengths and abilities. It is important to remember that moving naturally is not risk-free and so you should always talk with your chiropractor first to determine the green exercise activities that are most appropriate for you.

Quote to Inspire

“Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must be first overcome”

Samuel Johnson

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