

# Parent Page February 2015



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## Go Outside and Reap the Many Benefits of Play

Remember mom's medicine for boredom and bad behavior? "Go outside and play!" An exciting field of research, called the neuroscience of nature, validates Dr. Mom was right about the benefits of play. Enjoying the health effects of a walk in the woods or playing in the park is especially therapeutic in the modern age of windowless work cubicles and the artificial light of computer screens. As a show-me-the-science type of doctor I want to share with my readers how nature heals.

On your way to your nature walk suppose you went by your neighborhood neurologist and got wired with cameras (called functional MRIs) that peer inside your brain to reveal what's going on in there as you are walking in the woods. Here's a list of some of the fascinating health effects neuroscientists have discovered:

- decreased heart rate
- more relaxed blood pressure
- increased serotonin
- mellower moods
- decreased stress hormones
- stronger immune system
- fewer fearful thoughts



Neuroscientists dub the beauties of nature "visual valium." The insightful statement "It's pleasing to the eyes" also applies to the brain since the eye is simply an extension of the brain. A reminder I often say during my nature walk is: "Eye feel good."

Imagine inside your body and brain you have command centers full of dials, which are turned up and down and set just right for your physical and mental well-being. These dials are interconnected by chemical emails, hormones, that enable each system to talk to the other. When you walk outside the eye-brain dial says to the heart dial: "Relax, man, you don't need to beat so hard and fast." Then it says to the intestinal dials, "Gut feel good!" And even the pain of "itis" illnesses lessens after a walk or swim.

To enjoy the healing effects of nature, turn your desk toward the window, put plants in your office, and frequently turn your swivel chair away from the computer screen to enjoy the window view. To avoid the humped-back posture that is overtaking the ibrain and ibacks of habitual texters and smartphone glarers, here is Dr. Bill's simple back-friendly remedy: As often as possible look out and up and "say hi to the sky."

<http://www.askdrsears.com>

**KID MADE SNACK MIX!**  
*Are you serving a group of kids that all like something different? Put out several ingredients from the below list:*

Raisins Goldfish crackers  
Chex cereal Life cereal  
Cheerios Pretzels  
Raisins or Yogurt covered raisins, sunflower seeds, etc.  
Your choice of M&M's, chocolate chips, mini marshmallows, small chewy candies, etc.

1. Put the variety of ingredients out in bowls.
2. After children wash their hands--give them each a baggie. (To keep track of whose is whose - have them write their name on it) The ingredients will then go into each child's baggie with their choice of mixes.

**TIP:** Let children know how much 'measurement-wise' they can take of of-

### **Veggie Valentine**

You may not "carrot" all for me  
The way I care for you.  
You may "turnip" your nose  
When I plead with you  
But if your "heart" should "beet"  
with mine  
Forever "lettuce" hope  
There is no reason in the world  
Why we two "Cantaloupe."  
Author Unknown



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