Your Surroundings Can Affect Your Emotional Health

When you need to relax or decompress, where do you go?

If you were asked to visualize a destination that would improve your emotional well-being, what would it be? When asked these questions, thoughts sometimes turn toward nature. For others, thoughts of a simple, peaceful setting far from the noisy, hectic day-to-day environments we often find ourselves in come to mind. There is a reason why we seek out nature or other relaxing environments when we are stressed. Environmental psychologists, architects, and ergonomists have found that the environments we live and work in can affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

As more research is conducted, the role of environment in improving mood and preventing mental health concerns is becoming more apparent. While most of us are not able to whisk ourselves away to the mountains or the beach on a daily basis, there are some simple actions we can take to make our surroundings more health-promoting.

Contact Carebridge at: 1.800.437.0911 or visit www.myliferesource.com for more information!
Exposure to nature has been shown to be beneficial for a person’s emotional health. Nature provides a sense of relaxation and has been found to reduce the production of brain chemicals involved in the stress response.

Studies show that even three to five minutes of contact with nature can reduce feelings of anger and fear and increase feelings of pleasure. Views of natural settings such as a garden, field, or forest, have been shown to improve focus. Inside offices, potted plants as well as the view out the window have been shown to improve workers’ feelings of well-being.

Getting connected to nature can be quite simple. Even those who live in urban settings can usually find a local park or tree-lined street to visit each day.

If nature is difficult to find, consider a nature-inspired piece of artwork, a fish tank, or a potted plant to lift your mood.

One reason nature is health-promoting involves access to natural light. Daylight improves mood and synchronizes our sleep-wake cycle, or circadian rhythm. This allows us to stay alert during the day and to sleep at night. Retirement homes with more natural light have been associated with less cognitive decline for residents. Workplaces and homes with access to a lot of natural light allow our minds and bodies to maintain this natural cycle. While bright light, especially natural light, seems to boost thinking ability, studies show that dim light promotes feelings of relaxation. A lack of natural light is related to some forms of depression. With Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), the lack of sunlight impacts the mood of individuals who are vulnerable to seasonal changes. Those with SAD often use light therapy to help restore their serotonin levels and reduce their fatigue, sleep problems, and feelings of sadness. Even those with milder “winter blues” often benefit from light therapy or increased exposure to natural light.

Getting outside can be difficult for many, especially during the winter months. Research suggests that a one hour walk outside during winter months is recommended, but even sitting near a window, especially in the morning hours, can also help improve mood and lift depression symptoms.

Temperature conditions can also impact our moods. For example, those with summer Seasonal Affective Disorder can be impacted by summertime heat and often do better when their environments are cooled with air conditioning.

The color of the rooms we work and live in play a role as well. Research shows that to de-stress, expose yourself to the color blue. To inspire happiness, choose yellow. Red walls or furnishings can contribute to increased anger, so use that color sparingly in your home.

Noise can also be a factor. Exposure to noise has been connected to irritability, somatic complaints, anxiety and depression. It is important to find a low noise setting to de-stress in. And if you cannot find a way to eliminate noise, consider earplugs or soft, soothing music that can drown out the stress-inducing noises that surrounds you.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that cluttered, disorganized work and home settings can also contribute to feelings of stress. Simplifying, organizing, and de-cluttering can go a long way in promoting feelings of serenity and well-being. If you have been feeling stressed, down, or irritable, take a few moments to assess your environment. With a few small changes, you are likely to improve your emotional health. For more information and assistance making a plan that will work for you, contact Carebridge.