



# Living Well with AIMGA

VOL. 7 - HEALING WITH NATURE

Compiled by AIMGA's Health and Wellness Team

**HEALTHHUB FOR  
NEWCOMERS**



**Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!**

- IN THIS ISSUE
- INTRODUCTION
- CONNECTING WITH NATURE
- HOT TOPIC
- RED FLAGS
- HEALTH REMINDERS
- DID YOU KNOW?
- MYTH OR FACT?
- COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND ORGANIZATIONS
- IMG SPOTLIGHT

# JULY: Healing with Nature



Nature is everywhere around you, and this month, we encourage you to tap into the beauty of nature to support your overall wellbeing, including your physical and psychological health. Studies are increasingly showing the benefits associated with experiencing “awe” in nature, including decreased symptoms of stress and PTSD, sharpened cognition, and increased feelings of pure happiness and life satisfaction. There are plenty of ways to immerse yourself in nature, including going for walks, hikes, bike rides, or runs outside, visiting local parks or greenspaces, practicing mindfulness meditations, guided imagery, forest bathing, and many others. In this volume of the Living Well with AIMGA (LWWA) newsletter, we hope you will enjoy summer and the nice weather that comes with it through connecting with nature and doing some healing of your own. You will learn some practical tips to support your wellbeing through the great outdoors.

**Sources:** [Greater Good Science Centre, 2018](#); [Jimenez et al., 2021](#); [Participaction, 2023](#); [Tillmann et al., 2018](#); [American Psychological Association, 2020](#);

## CONNECTING WITH NATURE: RESOURCES & TIPS TO GET STARTED



There are so many ways to help you breathe fresh air into your lungs and dive headfirst into the nature around you. You can get started by: planting a tree or garden, spending time at a park or conservation area, going for an awe walk or hike, meditate or relax outdoors, participating in an outdoor sport (e.g., kayak, paddleboard, bike, fish), joining a nature group, exploring outdoor hobbies (e.g., birdwatching, plant identification), and recruiting friends or family to join you in these fun outdoor adventures!

- What is **Forest Bathing**? Learn about healing in the forest through these materials: [Forest Bathing Intro with Ronna Schneberger](#); [Forest Bathing Guide](#)
- Want to be an **advocate** to protect nature? Visit [Nature Canada](#), adopt a highway, or look into volunteering at your local park, conservation area, or even assist with trail construction or maintenance!



[Learn more about nature as a mental health prescription](#)

(Stanford Researchers)



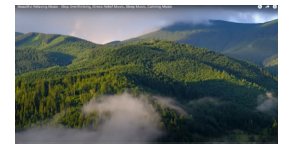
[TEDx Talk on Nature and Health](#)



[Tips to Connect with Nature](#)



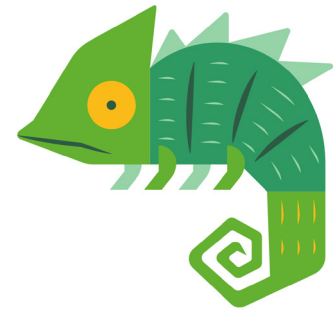
[Guided Forest Walk Meditation](#)



[Nature / Relaxing Video](#)

# HOT TOPIC:

## Experience the Wonders of the World Through Awe Walks



“Our relationship with nature – how much we notice, think about and appreciate our natural surroundings – is critical in supporting good mental health and preventing distress.” - Mental Health Foundation

**Awe walks** are mindful walks in nature that aim to cultivate a sense of awe and wonder. During an awe walk, one purposefully immerses themselves in their natural surroundings, often in scenic or awe-inspiring locations such as forests, mountains, or coastal areas. The focus is on being fully present and connected with the environment around you, absorbing in the sights, sounds, and sensations.

Awe walks encourage individuals to slow down, observe the present moment and intricate details of nature, and appreciate its beauty on a deeper level. They provide an opportunity to disconnect from the fast-paced demands of daily life and reconnect with the magnificence and calmness of the natural world. By intentionally opening ourselves to moments of awe and wonder, we can experience a profound shift in perspective and a renewed appreciation for the wonders of nature.

Research suggests that such encounters with nature can have a remarkable impact on our mental wellbeing. Being submersed in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, can increase happy feelings, inspire feelings of peace, serenity, and joy, while also reducing stress, anxiety, anger, and depression. By fostering a sense of interconnectedness with the natural world, awe walks can rejuvenate our spirits, ignite and rekindle our curiosity, and remind us of the vast wonders that exist beyond our immediate concerns, ultimately promoting a more positive and balanced state of psychological well-being.

**Try going on an Awe Walk today. Look for moments of wonder! To get started, you can [follow these steps](#).**

**Sources:** [Mental Health Foundation, 2023](#); [University of Minnosota, 2023](#); [Kaiser Permanente, 2022](#); [Psychology Today, 2020](#); [Sturm et al., video, 2020](#);



## RED FLAGS

**1** If you see a bear, follow these steps: stay calm, speak to the bear firmly and calmly, back away slowly, make yourself appear big, and do not drop your backpack, as it could provide protection.

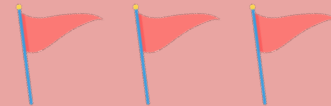
- [Click here](#) to learn about bear spray and how to use it.
- [Click here](#) for more tips on what to do if a bear approaches or attacks, tips for backcountry camping, etc.

**2** If you are lost on a hike or camping trip, it is important to follow the S-T-O-P acronym. S – stands for stop, stay put, and calm down, T – stands for think, O – stands for observe, and P – means plan. You can read more about these acronyms and what to do here in this [article](#). Make a call if you're able (dial 911 and share your location and use your

GPS coordinates or landmarks to help your rescuers pinpoint your location) or try to send a text if your call isn't going through.

**3** When exploring nature in the summer months, it is important to know the signs and symptoms of **heat stroke**. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately if you are caring for someone who has a high body temperature and is either unconscious, confused or has stopped sweating ([Health Canada, 2022](#)).

[Click here for more information about heat stroke!](#)



## HEALTH REMINDERS!



- **Avoid heat stroke** by wearing appropriate protective clothing during the day when the UV index is 3+ (hat, sunglasses, light-coloured clothing), drinking enough water, and wearing sunscreen. Learn more about how to stay healthy in the heat from these [Health Canada](#) tips or read up on our [May newsletter](#).
- **Practice road safety when biking:** make sure you have a properly fitting helmet, use a bell or your voice to alert pedestrians before passing, avoid traveling at high speeds (this is among leading causes of youth cycling injuries), use bike lanes and avoid busy streets, know and obey traffic rules, and bike with a buddy. It is important to brush up on the road trafficking signals and rules for your specific province.
- **When hiking or going backcountry camping:** plan ahead and arrive prepared, don't venture off marked paths, dress in layers, pack extra water and survival tools (e.g., first aid kit, bear spray, matches), travel with others, bring a compass and map and know how to use them, download the AllTrails app.
  - Check out the following: [AdventureSmart](#) trip-planning app, [Parks Blog](#), & [10 Golden Rules](#)
- For those who live in bear territory, knowing **how to avoid an encounter with a bear** is critical to enjoy nature safely. It is important to 1) make plenty of noise and travel in groups, 2) be aware of your surroundings and look/listen for bears and their signs (e.g., tracks, droppings, diggings, torn up logs, or overturned rocks), 3) keep your pet on a leash, and 4) carry bear spray and know how to use it.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Did you know that hospitalized patients have been shown to need fewer pain medicines and have better recovery when they have plants in their room and have a view of nature from their window? There is fascinating evidence suggesting the **connection between the body's healing process and proximity to plants and nature**. In one study, twenty-three surgical patients were assigned to rooms with windows looking out on a natural scene, and 23 matched patients had similar rooms with windows facing a brick building wall. The patients with windows to nature had shorter postoperative hospital stays, received fewer negative evaluative comments in nurses' notes, and took fewer potent analgesics than 23 matched patients in similar rooms with windows facing a brick building wall.
- Did you know that **staying present – or mindful – in your life** and while spending time in nature is one of the best things you can do to improve your focus, decrease your stress levels, and manage overwhelming emotions? As human beings, we often find it challenging to stay in the present moment. In the process, we end up missing out on being in the here and now... where life happens! Mindfulness means staying in the present moment with kind awareness of what is happening in our mind, emotions, and body. In doing so, we have opportunities to be in a healthier relationship with the pain and joy in our lives. Check out this mindfulness calendar to get started.

[Click here for the mindfulness calendar!](#)

- Did you know that nature is not only good for children's physical health, but it also **improves their ability to learn!** Nature has been shown to restore attention, relieve stress, help children to develop more self-discipline, and nature also increases children's level of engagement and interest in school. One study compared students randomly assigned to take science lessons either in a classroom or in a school garden and found outdoor lessons more effective for learning—and the more time they spent in the garden, the greater their academic gains and retention.
- Did you know that **forest bathing**, forest therapy, or Shinrin-yoku, was developed in Japan in the 1980s? There is a large amount of scientific evidence surrounding the health benefits of spending time in nature. Because of this, forest bathing became an integral part of preventive health care and healing in Japanese medicine. People who spend time in the forest experience decreased cortisol (stress hormone) levels, which can help relieve high blood pressure, heart conditions, skin conditions, and asthma.

**Sources:** [Centre for Mindfulness](#); [Anxiety Canada](#); [Mayo Clinic](#); [Park et al., 2008](#); [Ulrich, 1984](#); [Ontario Parks](#)



# MYTH OR FACT?

**Sources:** [van den Berg et al., 2015](#); [Coon et al., 2011](#); [Lee et al., 2015](#); [NIH News in Health, 2021](#); [Greater Good Science Centre, 2010](#); [Barton et al., 2010](#); [Brito et al., 2021](#)

Click on each myth bubble to find out true, evidence-based information.

There is no evidence that links nature to mental health outcomes.

You cannot experience health benefits just by looking at pictures of nature.

You can't get a sunburn on a cloudy day.

Indoor physical activity reaps the same benefits as doing the same activity outdoors.

Mindfulness has not been proven to be an effective treatment method and does not affect psychological wellbeing.



## COMMUNITY RESOURCES & ORGANIZATIONS

- [National Parks Canada](#)
- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Gardening Tips](#)
- [Canadian Wildlife Federation](#)
- [Inglewood Bird Sanctuary](#)
- [Point Pelee National Park – Great for Bird Watching in Ontario!](#)
- [Ski for Light Canada – January 2024](#)
- [Kananaskis Experiences](#)
- [BC Parks](#)
- [Saskatchewan Parks](#)
- [Alberta Parks – Backcountry Camping](#)
- [Manitoba Parks](#)
- [Ontario Parks](#)
- [Nova Scotia Parks](#)
- [Parks Newfoundland & Labrador](#)
- [PEI Parks](#)
- [Parks New Brunswick](#)
- [Nunavut Parks ; NWT Parks ; Yukon Parks](#)
- [All Trails](#)
- [Mindful.org](#)







## IMG SPOTLIGHT



**Dr. Fauzia Moyeen**

**Fauzia Moyeen** is an internationally trained physician from Pakistan who arrived in Canada in 2018. Over the past 30 years, Fauzia has provided cross-cultural training and consulting services in many countries in the field of diabetes management and diabetes education. She was the first physician in Pakistan to establish a Diabetes Club for children, working with diabetic youth to improve their mental health and physical health outcomes through education and empowerment. Fauzia was appointed as the Head of Academics in King Saud University Saudi Arabia, where she had the platform to demonstrate her skills in creativity, innovation, and curriculum design for para-medical and medical staff.

Through life and her own experiences and struggles, Fauzia has found that “when the breaking point hits and your mental health is at a low, immersing yourself in nature is the best medicine”. She goes on to say that our own personal relationships with nature provide great stress relief by enabling us to remove ourselves from the things that cause us stress in the first place. Fauzia recommends that if you're struggling

with feelings of sadness or anxiousness, visit a forest and focus your senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, and focus on steady deep breaths. Your blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormones all respond positively to nature. Connecting with Mother earth, bird watching and listening to their songs, watching the wonders of nature in the form of the northern lights, rivers, and finding inner peace and strength are the ways that Fauzia keeps maintaining hope and positive physical and psychological wellbeing.

### Skills gained from AIMGA:

As an IMG coming to Canada, you are still the same person with all your unique qualities, it is just the system that is different and challenging. I learned that with the right guidance, we can decide which professional route to follow. We have been exposed to such a versatile platform through AMIGA; I have met experts from different walks of life who have shared their stories, successes, and failures, giving us the reassurance that it is okay to not succeed on the first try, and that hope prevails as long as you do not give up on your dreams.

Career transitions was one of the strongest areas I found to be particularly helpful in my AMIGA training, as it gave me motivation and financial security. AIMGA especially helped me with fine-tuning my professional biography, resume, and getting a job in Canada in my field.

*“It is always good to follow your dreams and fulfill them, but HOW to do this is what is taught through AIMGA.”*

### Biggest Lesson Learned & Advice for Other IMGs:

Be Proactive in your life. Have courage in your heart. Take steps to break out of your comfort zone. Push yourself to the maximum of your capabilities and always believe in yourself. Never give up!

Work on both your soft skills and hard skills at the same time. Both are very important to groom one's personality and successful traits.

Be a good listener and be empathetic. Be courageous to accept your own pitfalls. Listen to advice and be open to what people have to say.



# INTERNATIONAL SELF CARE DAY

**International Self-Care Day** is a worldwide campaign held annually on July 24th to celebrate the importance of self-care. Join AIMGA in recognizing this day as an opportunity to take time out of your busy schedule to prioritize your own self care and do something for YOU. Self care and taking time to do what you love, or what “fills your cup”, is important to maintain and integrate into your own daily routine. Whether this is reading a book, listening to music, going for a walk or hike in nature, or something else, “you time” is important.

There are seven pillars of self-care: health literacy, self-awareness, physical activity, healthy eating, risk avoidance, good hygiene, and optimal use of products and services. Think about these pillars and where you might be lacking attention or self-love. Try to think of something you can change in your routine to combat this. To find resources on health literacy and the other six pillars of self-care, please go to [selfcare.ca](https://selfcare.ca).

**Sources:** [selfcare.ca](https://selfcare.ca); [Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada, 2020](#); [Self care ideas](#)

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