

By DAVID HEBER

SOCIAL media, email and the general 24/7 noise of life – particularly in urban areas – scatter our attention, leaving us more stressed.

Disconnecting from technology and reconnecting with nature gives our brain a much-needed recharge.

As our world becomes more urbanised, several studies indicate there are real benefits to getting outdoors with friends to hike for overall health.

### Building bone density

Hiking is weight-bearing exercise, which means your bones and muscles work harder against gravity.

This helps your body build or maintain bone density, which is critically important as we age.

Studies show bone density declines about one percent a year after age 40.

Getting outdoors for a hike could have a positive impact in helping to slow down this loss.

As an added bonus, hiking outdoors brings you a dose of vitamin D from sunlight exposure.

Vitamin D is essential for calcium absorption, which we need for bone health.

### Improve sleep quality

A long hike in nature can not only inspire a post-hike recovery

# Hiking for health

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Want some happiness extra credit? Hike with a friend or two.

Social interaction, especially with people with whom you have a strong bond, is an important ingredient for happiness and well-being.

### Combat depression

That vitamin D from the sunny outdoors that's so essential for bone health also combats depression.

Researchers at the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences at St. Joseph's Hospital in Ontario, Canada, reviewed 14 studies that included more than 31,000 total participants to determine a correlation between depression and vitamin D deficiency.

Vitamin D deficiency symptoms include fatigue, frequent illnesses, slow wound healing, bone and/or muscle pain, and depression.

Participants experienced substantial improvements in depression symptoms after receiving treatment for vitamin D deficiency.

In an expanded study, Bratman and his colleagues found that subjects who walked in nature for 90 minutes had increased activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain associated with depression and anxiety when deactivated.

The finding suggests hiking in



Getting out into nature by hiking with friends is a good way to strengthen both body and mind.

nature positively impacts mood.

### Social support

Exercise is already known to have many benefits for mental health, but a recent study found the positive influence joining a group to workout can have on reaching goals.

And the US National Institutes of Health reviewed various studies that connect the benefits of social support to improved health and wellbeing.

Regular nature hikes strengthen our heart, lungs and muscles, as well as our mind. And going with friends can also reap healthy benefits.

So, the next time you reach the top of a hill at the end of a dirt path, pause to admire the view and appreciate all you're doing for your health and happiness.

David Heber is the chairman of the Herbalife Nutrition Institute. The information provided is for educational purposes only and should not be considered as medical advice. The Star does not give any warranty on accuracy, completeness, functionality, usefulness or other assurances as to the content appearing in this column. The Star disclaims all responsibility for any losses, damage to property or personal injury suffered directly or indirectly from reliance on such information.