



June 30, 2016 – Grand Rapids, MI

## Research on Nature and Health

I'm back on the deck to write today's message about the benefits of spending time with nature (1). Researchers tested over 1,500 subjects who live in urban settings; they wanted to quantify visits to parks in cities with physical measures such as depression, blood pressure, social interactions, and physical activity (2). If you're a long-time reader, you know I prefer studies with solid measurements such as body weight or cholesterol levels. Surveys and questionnaires are subject to how a person feels at any given moment, but these researchers used the best instruments available.

They found that time spent in parks in urban areas was associated with less depression as assessed on a standard depression scale and lower self-reported blood pressure. In addition, there was an increase in social cohesion, the willingness of people to interact with others in positive ways. Finally, those who spent more time in parks had an increase in physical activity. This last variable is not surprising; many people probably use the parks for exercise.



How much time helps? Thirty minutes per visit. How often? More than once a week. Think of it in a dose-response manner: the more time spent in the park, the better the benefit for the variables tested.

All of this is nice, but can the benefits be quantified? What's the potential return on investment? I'll cover that tomorrow. Until then, spend some time with nature today.

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

### References:

1. <http://bit.ly/290tdYC>
2. Scientific Reports 6, Article number: 28551 (2016) doi:10.1038/srep28551

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