



July 1, 2016 – Grand Rapids, MI

Quantifying the Benefits of Nature

When this type of study is published, we can think of it as touchy-feely; in other words, it's about how we feel more than hard numbers. That may be true on the surface, but let's take a look at the effect on society from just one benefit of spending time in nature.

The study showed that if people spent just 30 minutes per week in a park, the rate of depression in cities could be reduced by 7%. While they didn't test it, I would say that's true for just about anybody who spends time in any park or in nature. But I'll add a qualifier for those such as Paula and I who live in suburbs or more rural areas and have a deck and great backyard: you have to appreciate it. You should spend some time relaxing and taking it in, even if you're there to work like I am much of the time.

What could a 7% decrease in depression mean to society? While the numbers vary depending on the source, the cost of depression is about \$200 million per year when considering treatment, lost productivity, and absenteeism. That means 30 minutes a week spent in nature could save the economy as much as \$14 million per year. More important, people would feel better—who knows how much more productive they would be and what great things they could accomplish? If we added the savings from a 9% decrease in hypertension, the total would be in the billions.

Being healthy is more than just eating well and exercising. We need breaks from the daily routine, and spending time in nature may be just what we need. I hope you'll start to do that over this holiday weekend, because taking a walk in the park is a wonderful way to improve your health.

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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