



# MoodNews

UPDATES FROM THE MOOD TREATMENT CENTER | SUMMER 2017

## Forest Therapy

Strolling through the woods, or even just sitting in them, has surprising health benefits. In Japan it's considered a standard treatment and covered by insurance. Over here we're just starting to catch on.

At its basic level, *forest therapy* involves walking in a forest for 1-4 hours. It helps if you engage with the environment, stopping to touch, explore, and notice nature's patterns and surprises.

Forest therapy helps depression, ADHD, alcoholism, and trauma-related conditions. It has physical health benefits as well, improving immune function, diabetes, pain,

and blood pressure.

The woods can literally change how the brain works. In one study, a 90-minute walk in the woods calmed the brain's worry center (the *prefrontal cortex*).

In that study, people either walked in the woods or the city.

Those who strolled the woods returned with significantly less worry than those who wandered in an the urban landscape. That surprising result has been replicated in 5 similar studies that point to a unique mental benefit for wooded walks.

It's not clear how often you'd need to walk in the forest to sustain these benefits. The physiologic benefits of a single forest walk are measurable up to one month after the walk. One researcher suggests that even a small dose of 5 minutes a day will bring some benefits.

### *How it works*

The forest may have a medicinal effect on the body. Plants produce phytoncides, which improve immune function. Forest air is rich in ionized oxygen, which is known to improve mood. Ocean air and waterfalls are also good sources of these ions, and indoor air ionizers can be used to treat depression:



Forest therapy doesn't involve exercise, but has similar benefits

[moodtreatmentcenter.com/airionizer.pdf](http://moodtreatmentcenter.com/airionizer.pdf)

The brain's stress-circuits tend to rest easily in natural environments. All day long the brain is on alert for potential threats, much as the secret service is around the president. The filter works extra hard in human-made environments, where it has more distractions to filter out. Allowing that filter to relax is particularly helpful in depression and anxiety, where it tends to run into overdrive so that even the smallest stresses feel overwhelming.

### *Seasonal Report*

## Sunscreen and Meds

Sunscreen can prevent cancer and aging in the skin, and it's even more important for people taking certain medications. Meds that make people sensitive to sunburn include lamotrigine, antipsychotics, tricyclic

## Local Nature

North Carolina is rich in forests, rivers, and lakes. Walks near water produce similar benefits as walks in the woods. Find local resources at [trailink.com](http://trailink.com) or google *Nature trails*.

### **Winston-Salem and Clemmons:**

Bethabara Park, Reynolda Gardens (there's a trail behind the house), Salem Lake, Graylyn, Muddy Creek Greenway, Triad Park, Horizons Park, CG Hills Park, Tanglewood Park.

**Mount Airy:** Pilot Mountain, Hanging Rock Park (with waterfalls trails).

**Greensboro:** The bridge behind our office leads to a forest trail. Also try Wild Turkey Mountain Bike Trail, Guilford Courthouse Military Park, City of Greensboro Country Park, The Bog Garden, Hester Park, Greensboro Arboretum.

antidepressants, and the –cycline antibiotics commonly used for acne.

Apply sunscreen 15-30 minutes before going out in the sun and reapply every 1-3 hours. We have a list of *Consumer Report's* top products at:

[moodtreatmentcenter.com/sunscreen.pdf](http://moodtreatmentcenter.com/sunscreen.pdf)

The simple option: Walmart's Equate or Target's Up & Up are recommended as best buys. Look for SPF of at least 30. If you use one that's not on that list, aim for higher SPF (at least 50) as many products don't live up to the SPF the on the label. Lotions tend to work better than sprays.

Besides sunscreen, use shade, broad-brimmed hats, sun clothing (Solumbra), and, to protect the retina, sunglasses.

## Treatment Breakthroughs

People with mood disorders can expect a full recovery. Below are new options for those still in the struggle:

### Medication

*Ingrezza* for tardive dyskinesia (this is a side effect of antipsychotic medications that involves involuntary movements – usually in the mouth, face, fingers or toes).

*Mirtazapine* for depression with fibromyalgia.

*Topiramate* for compulsive gambling.

### Natural

*Melatonin* for insomnia during benzo withdrawal.

*Probiotic yogurt* for stress and depression.

*Cerve* cooling device for insomnia.

*Blue light filtering glasses* for insomnia, bipolar disorder, and mania (we now sell these *at cost* for \$9).

## Nine Rules for the Gracious Acceptance of Psych Meds into Your Life

Psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison was one of the first professionals to come out publically as a person who struggles with bipolar. Her 1995 book *Unquiet Mind* gives an honest account of that journey, including her irreverent tips on accepting lithium. We've adapted them here for all psych meds:

1. Clear out the medicine cabinet before guests arrive for dinner.
2. Remember to put the meds back into the cabinet the next day.
3. Smile when people joke about how they think they "need to be on psych meds."
4. Nod intelligently, and with conviction, when your physician explains to you the many advantages the meds have in leveling out the chaos in your life.
5. Be patient when waiting for this leveling out. Very patient. Reread the Book of Job. Continue being patient. Contemplate the similarity between the phrases "being patient" and "being a patient."
6. Always keep in perspective how much better you are. Everyone else certainly points it out often enough, and, annoyingly enough, it's probably true.
7. Be appreciative. Don't even consider stopping your psych meds.
8. When you do stop and get manic or depressed, expect to hear two basic themes from your family, friends and healers:  
"But you were doing so much better, I just don't understand it."  
"I told you this would happen."
9. Restock your medicine cabinet.

## Practice News

### Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist.

Lalita Akers, MD, is the first child psychiatrist to join our practice. Dr. Akers works with all ages (she completed full adult and child training). A graduate of Wake Forest University's residency program, she provides medication treatment in Greensboro and Winston-Salem. She works with families and counsels people on natural and behavioral approaches to help them achieve full recovery.

**A welcome and farewell.** This month we welcome Paul Decker, LPC, and sadly bid farewell to Maddie Decker, LPC. Maddie is Paul's daughter and has brought a special warmth and unique skill to her work as a therapist here. She will be bringing those talents to Richmond where she is moving in June.

Like his daughter, Paul brings experience in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT). DBT helps people with intense mood swings, trauma, impulsivity, and unstable relationships.

Paul came to therapy after first working in the education field. He completed Wake Forest University's graduate program in professional counseling and continues to teach a few therapy courses each year in that program.

**Lindsay Reynolds, LCSW-A.** Lindsay provides therapy at our Clemmons and Winston-Salem offices. She draws from CBT and mindfulness therapy to help people manage stress in their daily lives. Lindsay completed her social work degree at the combined UNC-G / NC A&T program. Outside of work, she enjoys photography, reading, hiking, and spending time with her family.

### Opportunity for people ages 15-25.

If your parent has bipolar disorder, but you do not, you may be eligible to participate in a research study. It involves rating your mood regularly over two years. Compensation ranges from \$3,000-5,000; sign up at:

[moodtreatmentcenter.com/study.htm](http://moodtreatmentcenter.com/study.htm)