

When I was a kid, I remember endless days playing outside with my siblings and friends and my mother yelling for us to get inside. We were outside in any type of weather. Our neighborhood was always bustling with children. I loved the sounds of children laughing and playing outdoors. Hearing those sounds and wanting to join in was my cue to get outside!

Today, many neighborhoods lack the sounds of children laughing and playing outdoors. This generation of children seems to participate in indoor activities much more than outdoor activities and many neighborhoods are silent. This is a shame because outdoor activities offer many health and emotional benefits.

The weather these past few weeks has been snowy and quite frigid. Lately, many would much rather snuggle up on a sofa with a nice warm mug of hot cocoa than venture outside. Fortunately, the weather will warm up, and we will begin to enjoy the great outdoors and reap all the health benefits that being outside offers.

The National Wildlife Federation lists the following advantages of outdoor activities:

- Increased levels of vitamin D which is needed for strong healthy bones

- Increase concentration levels and learning

- Decreased incidences of hyperactivity and inattention in children

- Decreased incidences of obesity in adults and children

- Decreased cases of myopia (nearsightedness) in children

- Decreased depression, anxiety, stress and aggression among children and adults

Increased appreciation for nature and the environment

These are just a few of the benefits that were reported. The National Wildlife Federation's "Be Out There" campaign and Michele Obama's "Let's Move Outside!" initiative are programs that connect children and adults with nature. They are both working along with other organizations to encourage children and adults to get outside. Let's jump on the band wagon and encourage each other to get outdoors! You might find that you will appreciate the couch and cocoa much more after some outdoor physical activity.

For a list of outdoor activities visit the National Wildlife Federation website. <http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Be-Out-There/Activities.aspx>