

Lecturer's Contribution

Therapeutic Benefits of Hiking

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During the Movement Control Order (MCO), the government had put its citizens under self-quarantine. Thankfully, the MCO has been lifted and fellow Malaysians can now enjoy previously prohibited outdoor activities such as hiking because this activity provides you with various health benefits.

Physical benefit

Hiking can help you lose weight. An hour of hiking can result in the loss of between 440 and 550 calories.

The calories you burn while hiking are determined by a number of factors: the type of terrain, length of your hike, the rate at which you move, backpack and gear you are carrying, and your body weight. A 73-

kilogramme hiker, for example, could burn one-third of his/her daily calorie (Bushak, 2019).

As hiking is a cardiovascular activity, it can help lower blood pressure and improve blood sugar levels. It improves leg strength, core stability, and balance. The more difficult the terrain, the more balance and core strength is necessary, as more muscles are used to manage the steeper slope. On the way up, your glutes and quads work hard to keep you from falling forward. The more challenging the trail, the greater the potential cardiovascular benefit is. This form of exercise is a great activity for people of all ages and abilities because it can be tailored to their needs (Kates, 2020).

Mental benefit

A study shows that people who walk for 90 minutes in a natural environment, as opposed to participants who walk in high-traffic urban surroundings, exhibit a decrease of activity in a region of the brain associated with depression. Moreover, levels of rumination or “repetitive thought focused on negative aspects of the self” are lowered and show a reduced neural activity in an area of the brain linked to risk for mental illness (Bratman, Hamilton, Hahn, Daily & Gross, 2015).

Hiking can also boost brainpower. It promotes neurogenesis, or the formation of new neurons. According to Sleiman et al. (2016), this activity induces the release of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). BDNF has been shown to boost cognitive function and alleviate symptoms of despair and anxiety. In short, it is a technique to nourish and nurture your brain positively.

Social benefit

Regular walking groups allow walkers to meet new acquaintances who enjoy the same hobby. This allows them to connect and develop friendships. Along the walking and hiking trails, fellow hikers, when meeting, would exchange greetings and encouragement. In addition, hiking promotes a sense of shared accomplishment especially when you reach the top or complete the route.

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A study by Nik Jaafar et al. (2021), exhibits that youths in Malaysia are overly reliant on the Internet. The average Malaysian spends 9.17 hours daily on it (Muller, 2021). Hiking is a great method to disconnect from technology for a while. You can spend more quality time with friends, family, or even on your own without having to constantly check on your phones.

How to get started

Hiking is essentially a sport. Thus warming up is required for any sport or workout. A quick workout before hiking can save you pain and aches. Warm up your ankles, feet, and calf muscles before you hike. Start with shorter hikes on nearby trails that are more familiar to you. If you are short of ideas, go to <https://www.alltrails.com/>. This app allows users to access a database of trail maps, photos and the nature of the trail from easy to hard which have been verified by experts and reviewed by fellow hikers. Choose one that suits your ability and physical fitness. Additionally, a decent pair of shoes can assist you to avoid ankle injuries or falls. In a weather like Malaysia, it is important to choose something that is light and loose fitting. Also, come prepared with a bottle of water and some snacks. Using a hiking pole too can improve stability and reduce strain on your legs' joints, particularly when ascending and descending a hill.

Hiking experiences

These are some hiking experiences by fellow APB colleagues:

Bukit Limau is a nice and easy trail located in Bandar Baharu, Kedah. The surrounding area around the hill is mostly lime orchards, hence the name Bukit Limau. It was formerly known as Bukit Banglo, due to the existence of a big house built by the landowner on the hilltop. According to the landowners, they are now working to establish the largest Black Thorn durian plantation in Malaysia around the hill area. The hike was very easy and relaxing, with most of the track paved with concrete by the orchard owners. The hiking route is around 2.9 kilometres and takes about 40 minutes. Since the track is easy, this makes the place very suitable for beginner and family hiking activities, where children and elderly people can be involved. There is also a forest trail for those who are looking for more adventure, but you need to be extra prepared to face challenging rocky terrains and possible wildlife encounters.



Rock formation at Bukit Limau

Bukit Hijau is a 4.2 kilometer moderate hike and walking trail at Jalan Tembaga in Island Glades, Green Lane. Once you reach the foot of the hill, you can park your vehicle at the end of rows of terraced houses. At the foot of the hill, lies a waterfall. It takes about 40 minutes to complete the hike. Bukit Hijau offers two peak stops. Boulders can be found near the summit. Climb carefully on them to witness a breathtaking view of Penang. On one side you can see Paya Terubong while on the other side the Penang Bridge.



View of the valley from Bukit Hijau

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The Teluk Bahang-Laksamana Hill-Tiger Hill-Penang Hill trail is a 15.1 kilometer trail and is rated as difficult. The trail is primarily used for hiking, walking, nature trips and bird watching. The trail is challenging, especially the long climb up to Laksamana Hill. Ilianis took 7 hours to reach Penang Hill. At the top, one can experience a bird's -eye view of Penang island. She even got the chance to witness an eagle flying over her head.



Two roads diverged in a green wood

Conclusion

Try hiking and see how it feels. Reconnecting with nature and surroundings can bring a whole new experience physically, mentally and socially. To most hikers, hiking is addictive. Despite encountering hard climbs at times, we hikers must agree with the saying, “the best views come after the hardest climb”.

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