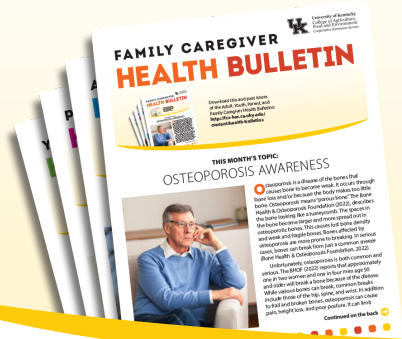


FAMILY CAREGIVER

HEALTH BULLETIN



SEPTEMBER 2024

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

STEP INTO NATURE: THE BENEFITS OF AUTUMN ON THE MIND AND BODY



While you may find autumn colors to be beautiful and crisp fall temperatures to be invigorating, did you know that fall can also positively affect mental and physical well-being? Here are a some ways that autumn keeps us healthy:

- **Sensory stimulation.** Neurons in the brain are more likely to repair and produce neurogenesis in an enriching environment that includes sensory stimulation. The fall offers bright colors, visual contrasts, leaves to touch, wind to feel, and fresh air and falling leaves to smell. The fall harvest in Kentucky stimulates taste buds with a variety of produce including apples, pumpkins, and squash.

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After a warm and sticky summer, the cool fall weather can be a welcome platform for outdoor activity.

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- **Happiness.** Fresh air is a natural way to raise oxygen levels in the brain. As a result, serotonin is released. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter associated with mood regulation and happiness. According to the Cleveland Clinic, normal serotonin levels help you stay focused, emotionally stable, happy, and calm.
- **Stress relief.** Fall colors — reds, oranges, and yellows — can stimulate the brain and trigger positive emotions. When you feel positive emotions, you are more likely to use them to calm yourself. When you're calm and composed, problem-solving is more effective.
- **Enhanced memory.** Research from the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology reports that recall, memory, and clarity in thinking improve when temperatures drop.
- **Nostalgia.** For many, autumn triggers memories such as new academic years, fall festivals and dances, Halloween celebrations, Thanksgiving with family, jumping in piles of leaves, picking apples, harvesting crops, hayrides, and horseback rides. According to research in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, a stroll down memory lane improves mood, stimulates inspiration and motivation, puts you in touch with your authentic self, and contributes to meaning in life. People high in nostalgia are also more likely to deal with stressful situations in healthy ways, including connecting with others and asking for help. Nostalgia can also promote storytelling, which enhances social connections and meaningful relationships.
- **Awareness.** Witnessing the cycle of life and death with each falling leaf helps you become more attuned to nature and life around you. Becoming more aware of your surroundings can be grounding and helps reduce self-centered thoughts, which can boost confidence and self-esteem.
- **Physical activity.** After a warm and sticky summer, the cool fall weather can be a welcome platform for outdoor activity. Moving more outside and



sitting less inside is good for the respiratory system, muscles, and bones. Movement also supports the immune system, heart, and mental health.

- **Goal setting.** Associated with going back to school and new beginnings, some people view fall as a time for a fresh start. To start new, it is important to set goals and prioritize favorite activities, which are both important tasks that can benefit mental health. Fall helps keep the focus on moving forward with a fresh outlook.

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Written by: Amy F. Kostelic,
Associate Extension Professor,
Adult Development and Aging
Edited by: Alyssa Simms
Designed by: Rusty Manseau
Stock images:
Adobe Stock

