**Parish Nurse Notes for APRIL 2021**

We often hear about the [risks of getting too much sun](). While it's true that sunburns and skin cancer are very real threats and that SPF is essential, there are also positive effects of sun exposure. The sun is much more than its potential pitfalls and can do plenty of good things for your body — soaking up some sunlight can do wonders for your mind, bones, and more.

When you give your skin access to a healthy dose of the sun's rays, you are likely to experience some tangible benefits immediately. Here are five ways the sun can affect your mental and physical health.

### 1. Increased Vitamin D

Vitamin D has some [important functions]() in the body. It promotes reduced inflammation and modulates cell growth. It's also very hard to get enough from food sources alone. The sun is the best natural source of Vitamin D, and it only takes [5-15 minutes]() of sunlight a few times a week to notice a difference. Get outside and expose yourself to direct sun on your arms and face to soak up this necessary vitamin. Just remember to use sunscreen if you'll be outside for more than 15 minutes.

### 2. Improved Mood

It turns out "sunny disposition" is more than just an expression: [Researchers at BYU]() found more mental health distress in people during seasons with little sun exposure. On the contrary, days with plenty of sunshine were associated with better mental health — in fact, the availability of sunshine has more impact on mood than rainfall, temperature, or any other environmental factor.

Getting some sun increases your serotonin and helps you stave off Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and sun exposure can also help people with anxiety and depression, especially in combination with other treatments.

### 3. Higher Quality Sleep

That serotonin you soak up from the sun's rays does more than boost your mood – it might also help you get more restful sleep at night. Working in tandem with serotonin is melatonin, a chemical in your brain that lulls you into slumber and one that sun also helps your body produce. Suffering from insomnia? Try to stick to traditionally light and dark cycles, getting sunlight during the day so you can catch some zzz's at night.

### 4. Stronger Bones

Remember how we mentioned Vitamin D does some pretty important stuff for your body? Low Vitamin D has been linked to diseases like osteoporosis and rickets, and

one of the most specific benefits of Vitamin D is earning stronger bones and teeth. Move over, calcium!

How much Vitamin D do you need? For adults, a daily intake of 4,000 international units (or IUs) is recommended. While calcium intake is also crucial for bone health, getting enough sun helps your body absorb the calcium.

## 5. Lower Blood Pressure

When sunlight hits your skin, your body releases something called nitric oxide into your blood. This compound brings down blood pressure and improves heart health. Maintaining healthy blood pressure can reduce your risks of cardiac disease and stroke. Feelings of relaxation may also naturally bring down blood pressure, so boosting your happiness by soaking up rays also aids in keeping your pressure down.

The sun can be your body's best friend. It not only boosts your mood and can be an effective part of treatment for depression and SAD, but its rays have tangible benefits for our physical well-being. Stuck under cloudy conditions for a week or more? Consider a light therapy lamp, which can be installed in any room and provide a temporary alternative to the sun.

As always, use proper precautions and make sure to visit your doctor for regular skin examinations to be sure you're not at risk for skin cancer.