



ASSOCIATION OF
Nature & Forest Therapy
GUIDES & PROGRAMS

FOREST THERAPY AND MENTAL HEALTH





THE WORLD WE LIVE IN TODAY EPIDEMIOLOGICAL DATA ON DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

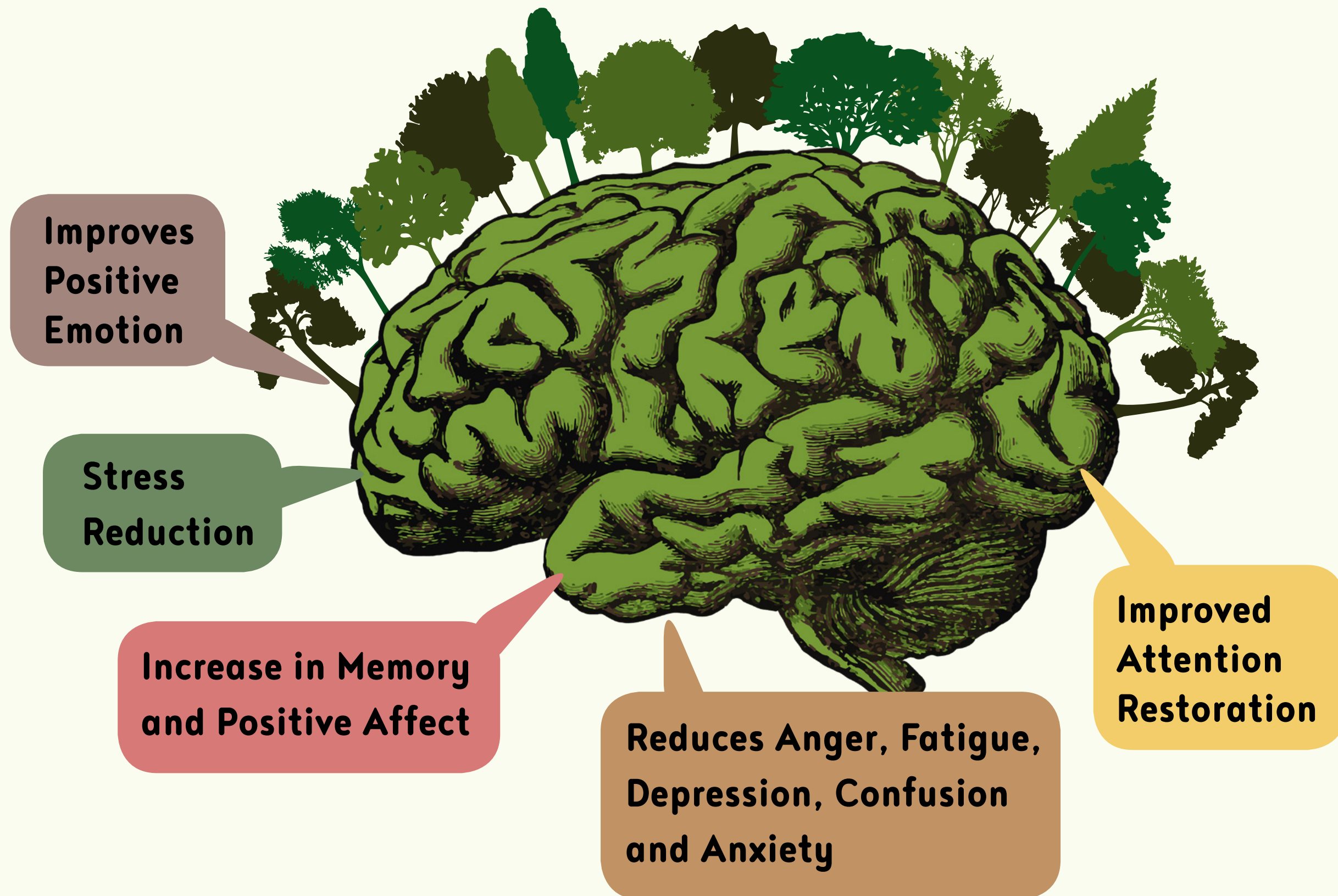
In 2015, a World Health Organization (WHO) report put forward alarming numbers in the increase of registered cases of Depression and Anxiety worldwide. 300 million cases, representing 4.4% of the world population and an 18% increase in incidence from the previous report dated 2005.



(Ref: Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders, Global Health Estimates. WHO. 2015)

Depression is classified by the WHO as the greatest contributor to incapacity for productive activity, registering 7.5% of DALYs (Disability Adjusted Life Year) which is a measure of overall disease burden, expressed as the cumulative number of years lost to ill health, disability or early death.

Europe alone has 52.98 million registered cases of Depression representing 16% of the world incidence. The highest incidence in Europe is registered in 1st place in the Russian Federation, 2nd in Germany and 3rd in France.



HOW NATURE AND FOREST THERAPY ARE BENEFICIAL TO MENTAL HEALTH


Over the past decade there has been extensive research into the benefits to mental health of being in nature. Time in forests seems to significantly improve mood in countless studies replicated in a variety of cultures. Many studies have compared the psychological effects of urban walking vs. nature walking and have found that nature walks tend to correlate with greater mood improvements. Below you will find some of the most compelling research results in different aspects of mental health:

POSITIVE EFFECTS IN AFFECTIVE DISORDERS

In a 2012 study by Marc G. Berman *et al*, published in the Journal of Affective Disorders, Volume 140, Issue 3, November 2012, pages 300–305, Interacting with nature improves cognition and affect for individuals with Depression, results demonstrated a 50% increase in memory and positive affect after patients walked in nature.

 *Full Study* [HERE](#)

Published in March 2016 in Ecopsychology, Iwata *et al* in their study “Benefits of Group Walking in Forests for People with Significant Mental Ill-Health” concluded that “group forest walks” as a form of therapy could be an effective adjunctive intervention for people who are experiencing enduring mental ill-health.

 *Full study* [HERE](#)



In 2007, Morita et al published the study, ‘Psychological effects of forest environments on healthy adults: Shinrin-yoku (forest-air bathing, walking) as a possible method of stress reduction’. This study with 498 volunteers revealed that forest environments are advantageous with respect to acute emotions, especially among those experiencing chronic stress. Accordingly, shinrin-yoku may be employed as a stress reduction method, and forest environments can be viewed as therapeutic landscapes. Therefore, customary shinrin-yoku may help to decrease the risk of psychosocial stress-related diseases.

 Full study [HERE](#)

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM ACTIVITY

The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health published a study by Chia Pin-Yu *et al* in August 2017 – Effects of Short Forest Bathing Program on Autonomic Nervous System Activity and Mood States in Middle-Aged and Elderly Individuals, concluding that the short forest bathing program elicited a **significant decrease in pulse rate and systolic and diastolic blood pressure** in middle-aged and elderly individuals. A short walk in the forest can reduce tension, anger, fatigue, depression, confusion and anxiety as well as improve **positive emotion**. In conclusion, the short forest bathing program contributes physiological and psychological healthy benefits on middle-aged and elderly people.

 Full study [HERE](#)

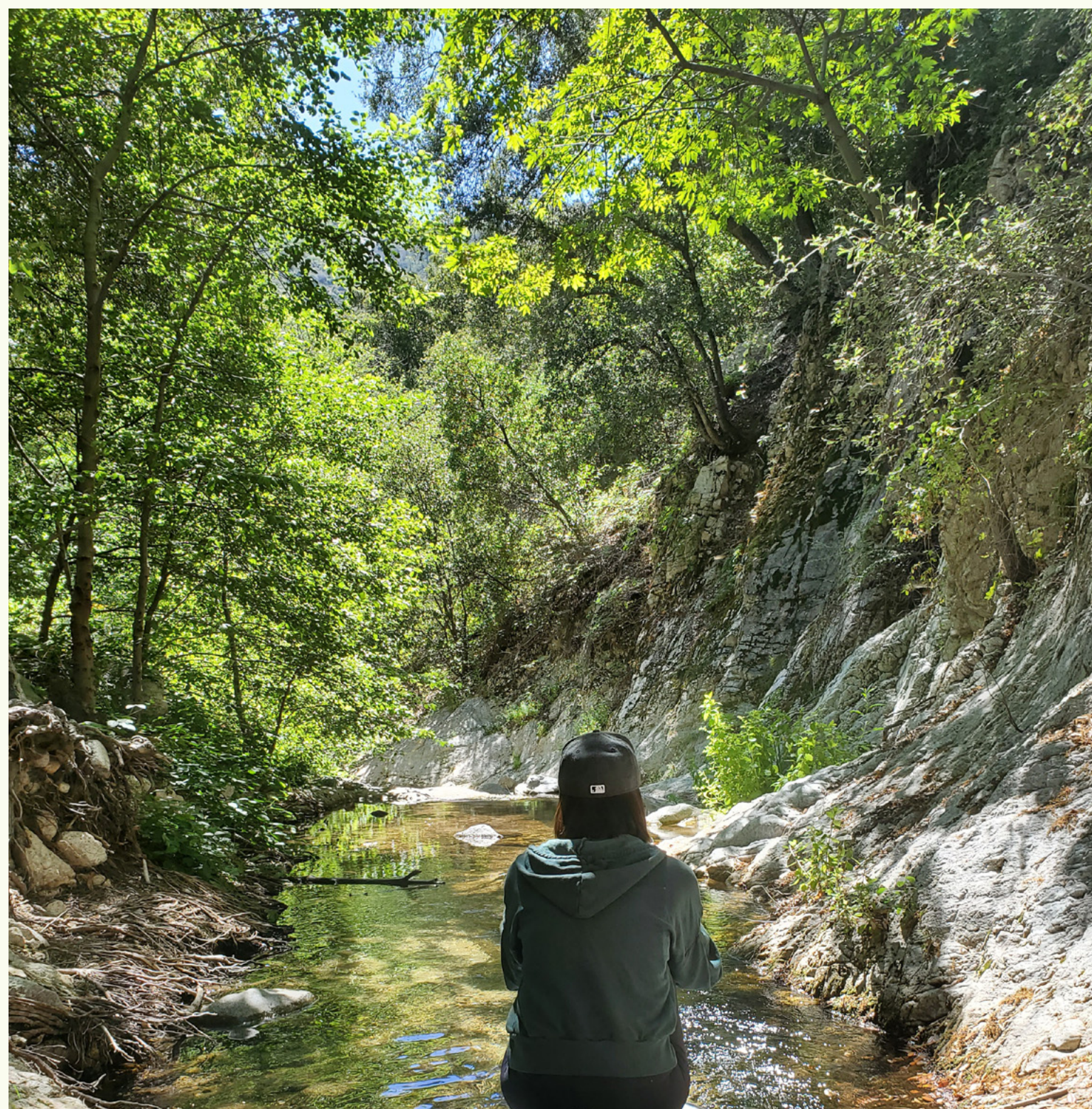


SHORT-TERM MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS AND DECREASE IN SUBJECTIVE STRESS

The evidence of short-term mental health benefits from contact with nature in general and with forests or woodland is well documented. Forest visits are reported to have an influence on positive emotions and decrease subjective stress and negative emotions such as depression, fatigue, general anxiety, uncertainty and tension (*e.g. Meyer and Kotsch 2017; O'Brien et al. 2014; Tyrväinen et al. 2014; Martens and Bauer, 2013; Morita et al. 2007*)

IMPROVED ATTENTION RESTORATION

Spending time in nature has demonstrated improved attention restoration in individuals suffering from subjective stress. (*e.g. Berman et al. 2008; Berto et al. 2005; Hartig et al 2003; Laumann et al. 2003*).



RESTORATION FROM STRESS

Greenspaces and forest environments are perceived as having a positive effect on restoration from stress and wellbeing and stronger short-term cognitive benefits than comparable experiences in urban settings (e.g. Stigsdotter et al. 2016; Gidlow et al. 2016). Many studies show that visits to nature increase positive and decrease negative mood states, increase perceived restoration, vitality, and support the renewal of directed attention capacity (e.g. *Tsunetsugu et al. 2013; Barton et al. 2010; Korpela et al. 2008*).

"A short walk in the forest can reduce tension, anger, fatigue, depression, confusion and anxiety as well as improve positive emotion"

