

Exercising outdoors: an alternative way to fitness

---by Iveta Lyubenova, nutritionist & personal trainer, BFM Consulting (<http://www.bestformyself.com/en/>)

Experts have long recommended cross-training (practicing different active skills or pursuits) as one of the best solutions to the challenges of boredom, plateauing and overuse injuries. And moving to the great outdoors can be a particularly good way of diversifying your program while also building in some changes of scenery.



There are some very real psychological and physiological benefits to balancing your exercise routine with building in some outdoor exercise. To start, moving from indoor to outdoor environments can help you expand and custom tailor your athletic experience based on your changing moods and needs, so you get more satisfaction out of your fitness regimen over time. Research shows that the rejuvenation you feel after an outdoor workout is not just in your imagination. Exposure to the elements and outdoor scenery can have a marked, positive effect on your mental, emotional and physical state.

Another major benefit to outdoor training is that it tends to be more engaging and mentally stimulating due to the changing scenery and terrain — not to mention the mood boost that comes from being outside in the sunshine. Furthermore, many outdoor activities involve higher levels of weight-bearing activity, which improves bone density by stimulating greater bone development.

Recent studies have focused on the negative ions present in outdoor environments. Created when air molecules come in contact with sunlight, radiation, and moving air and water, these tiny electrically charged particles have been found to generate feelings of alertness, mental clarity and elevated mood. Artificially produced negative air ions significantly benefit both seasonal and nonseasonal depression. Naturally occurring negative ions are found in the greatest concentrations in the mountains, near the crashing ocean surf and in the clean air after a thunderstorm.

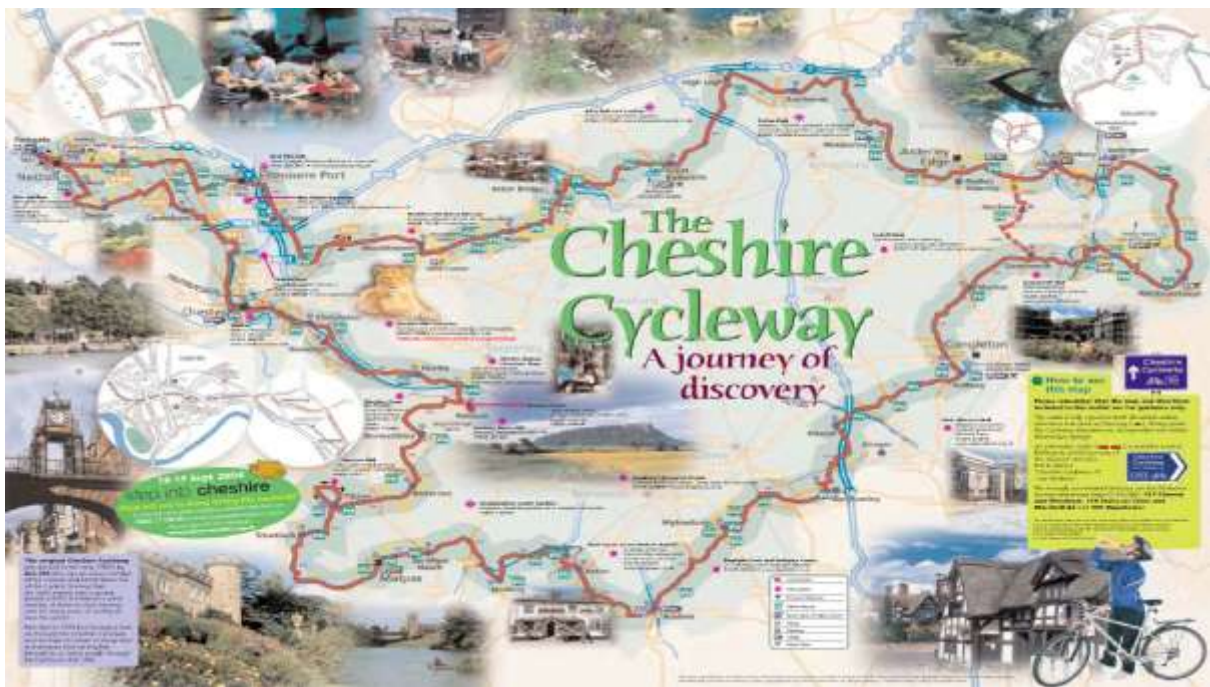
Many outdoor activities are also terrific ways to improve your proprioception (your sense of balance and where your body is in space). In the outdoors, you need to watch for and accommodate all sorts of obstacles — tree roots, potholes, puddles and the like. The adjustments your body must make on changing terrain engage core and skeletal muscles that aren't as active when the turf doesn't vary.

Most outdoor workouts have the built-in appeal of a destination. Whether you're doing an out-and-back run or biking a mountain-trail loop, physically proceeding along a route and gauging your progress toward a bona fide place offers some folks a sense of satisfaction and motivation they just can't seem to get from the progress bars or time-elapsed readout on equipment monitors.

To sum up, a strategically and intuitively balanced indoor-outdoor workout program can be the most direct route to your fitness goals — and it can significantly deepen your fitness satisfaction. So take a leisurely run on a riverside trail, infusing your body with mood-boosting negative ions that leave you feeling ready for anything.

Outdoor exercise in Vale Royal by Mark Kearns, freelance personal trainer, nutritional advisor and sports massage therapist.

There are many great places to exercise in the outdoors – from cycling, walking or playing sports. At Riverside Organics Farm near Davenham Active Environment Health and Fitness run an outdoor fitness club and Personal Training sessions – go to <http://active-environment.co.uk> for more information.



As you can see, you can circumnavigate the whole of Cheshire if you are feeling energetic ☺!
If not, try some of these smaller routes:

- Weaver wanderer and Whitegate way, Winsford.
- Delamere Forest.
- Biking the Backroads, near Marbury, Northwich.
- Sandstone Trail, near Beeston Castle.
- Go to www.cheshire.gov.uk/cycling or www.sustrans.org.uk for more information and detailed maps of these routes.

Nature Reserves & Country Parks – go to www.discovercheshire.co.uk for detailed maps.

- Shakerley Mere, near Byley, Middlewich.
- Marbury Country Park, near Anderton, Northwich (see below).
- Anderton Nature Park, next to Marbury.
- Little Budworth Country Park, near Oulton Park, Tarporley.
- Delamere Forest, near Cuddington, Northwich.
- Brereton Heath Nature Reserve, near Holmes Chapel.
- We are also close to Snowdonia, the Peak District and the Lake District (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) for more energetic days out.

With all this choice you have no excuse not to get out and about more. Get some eco-therapy and improve your health and fitness.