

## Gratitude for Nature

One of the most powerful ways to reduce stress and improve your mood is to observe nature. During this time of Thanksgiving, it is wise to be grateful for the scenic gifts Lake and Mendocino Counties have to offer.

Spending time in nature can be soothing to your mind and body. It mandates the removal of all the technology that can dominate our lives like cell phones, television and computers. Often technology is a distraction to our peace. When you take the time to watch a sun rise on Clear Lake, you leave your computer behind. If you travel to the Mendocino coast at Albion, your cell phone will not work. Nature gives us a golden opportunity to be present, to breathe, and to observe beauty.

Beauty activates the right brain, which naturally increases stress reduction chemicals in your body. You can't be stressed in the moment you appreciate beauty. We often here of the stress relief exercise can bring, but it is also good to understand nature can give us the same benefit. Scenic beauty is its own meditation. We are all fortunate to live in an area of abundant beauty.

When I look out on Clear Lake I am reminded of a local geologist who once came to my office as a patient and gave me some incredible facts about our lake. As I look at the lake, I am in awe that it is North America's oldest lake. My mind slows down and random thoughts subside when I contemplate how ancient our lake is. Clear Lake is 450,000 years old and is in constant motion (source: [www.co.lake.ca.us](http://www.co.lake.ca.us)). There are over 20 seismic events every 24 hours that measure below the level of our perception. Clear Lake is a living, moving, and breathing wonder. Many times I have watched the moon rise over Clear Lake and those images are imprinted forever in my mind. It is interesting to note that I can't remember the last thing I was stressed about, but I will remember a moon rise on Clear Lake for the rest of my life.

My wife and I recently spent two nights on the Mendocino coast. Talk about relaxation. Our room did not come with a television, but it did come with a majestic sunset on the Pacific Ocean. Our time there was not only peaceful to our mind, but it also nurtured our relationship. We didn't need to say much to each other in terms of conversation because the beauty of our view was all that needed to be said. The color, the smells, the sky, the ocean, the cliffs and bluffs were enough on their own, to provide a loving time together. When you contemplate nature and observe creation, not much needs to be said. Creation has a silent and soothing language all its own.

Here are two suggestions to get in touch with nature and relieve stress. Visit the top of the Hopland Grade Highway 175 and have lunch. There is a large area where you can pull off the road and park and see all of Lake County. It is an amazing view. Remember to leave your cell phone at home.

Visit the Mendocino coast and walk the Botanical Gardens near Fort Bragg. A quote I heard once about nature is, "Life is found at the boundary." In this case, the boundary is

where the continent of the United States meets the Pacific Ocean. When you walk through the Botanical Gardens you realize the truth of this statement that life is found at the boundary.

I understand a trip to the coast requires some effort, but the experience is worth it. The coast offers beauty that takes your breath away, found at the boundary. Nature is its own reward. We spend time in it because we can, because it is simple, because its value is self-evident. Lake and Mendocino offer many chances to be in nature and to be thankful for their gifts.

Matthew McQuaid, DPM is a board certified foot surgeon practicing in Lakeport. He has a particular interest in Mind/Body medicine and its impact on healing. He is an award winning author and teacher. Please share this article with a friend. For more information please call 707-263-3727 and visit [www.drmcquaid.com](http://www.drmcquaid.com)