

Benefits Of Social Nudity: General Health & Stress Reduction

By Naturist Philosopher



This is an edited version of a blog posted on 12th March 2015. Part of a series of blogs published on The Naked Philosopher's website, and the original version of Benefits of Social Nudity: Stress Reduction and General Health¹ can be read in full here.

Introduction

Most naturists believe that social nudity has significant health benefits, but there doesn't seem to be much clarity about exactly how. In the early days of naturism (up to 1940s, say), there was a strong emphasis on healthful living. In Germany, nudity was considered a part of healthy living, sometimes referred to as *Lebensreform*² ('life reform' in English) that included several principles, like abstinence from alcohol, tobacco (and other addictive drugs), exercise, a healthy diet (in particular vegetarianism) and living in "harmony" with nature with exposure to fresh air and sunshine. For most of these principles there was no logical reason for nudity, except that it was regarded as the "natural" state of humans.

Today, other than nudity itself, these general principles are widely accepted by the public – at least as much as within naturism itself – so it is difficult to regard them as beneficial aspects of contemporary naturism specifically.

It is true, however, that exposure to sunlight (specifically the ultraviolet end of the spectrum) enables our skin to synthesize vitamin D³, required to avoid certain diseases (e.g. rickets⁴ in children). Research also suggests we derived other benefits from vitamin D but these claims have not been properly investigated nor is the required dosage known. For instance, long before antibiotics existed, those diagnosed with tuberculosis⁵ would be sent to sanatoriums for the ‘sunshine cure’.

The effects of excessive exposure to sunlight are not trivial and well documented: dried, prematurely aged skin, sunburn, and an increased risk of melanoma⁶. Nor is it necessary to be naked. We can synthesize enough Vitamin D through moderate sunbathing, even in northern Europe, or through our diet.

Apart from claims that social nudity has benefits for our physical health, it is also alleged it has positive effects on our mental health too. Although these claims are generally vague, they do have a “common sense” feel to them, now that we have a better understanding of how psychology can affect our physical health. It has been discovered that psychological stress⁷, especially chronic stress⁸, can be a major factor in several physical diseases, like cardiovascular diseases⁹ and diabetes¹⁰. There may be different reasons why you are suffering from psychological stress, some physical, others non-physical. We are going to concentrate on the latter, with many nudists saying that stress reduction is one of the main benefits of social nudity.

What is stress?

Suppose you are out for a hike in the hills. You go around a bend in the trail, and just 10 feet ahead of you on the trail is a large rattlesnake. Your heart starts to pound, you forget about the trail mix you’ve just been nibbling on, you stop daydreaming about the new car you’d like to buy, and you look quickly around for the nearest large rock or stick. There is a fair size stone nearby, but it’s a pretty large snake, so you decide to make a strategic retreat instead. That’s stress.

Stress is not inherently a bad thing. Our experience of physical stress is what makes possible our dealing with physical threats, e.g. dangerous snakes, effectively in a response known as “fight or flight”¹¹. It sends adrenalin to our heart, making it pump harder to send sugar-laden blood to our muscles in preparation for one or the other. It is what sportsmen and women feel as they play, or when we lesser mortals run for the bus.

In early man, whatever dangerous situation was, it was quickly resolved and the body would quickly return to normal. Today, there are a host of sources for stress: the fear of losing your job, actual unemployment, overwork, high bills and low pay are just a few. Occasional stress in dangerous situations is a small problem when compared to the emergency itself. But when we are constantly under stress, it becomes chronic and that can lead to physical illness.

How is psychological stress harmful to health?

The most obvious bad thing to happen to your body constantly in ‘fight or flight’ mode is excessive wear and tear on the cardiovascular system¹². The heart works harder than necessary, blood pressure is higher than needed, putting extra strain on the heart, which can lead to either a heart attack or stroke. Not only can chronic stress lead to heart disease but to numerous other health problems besides, with high hormone levels leading to higher infections, slow healing wounds, progression of cancer and stomach ulcers¹³, to name just a few that medical scientists now suspect physiological stress is a contributory factor.



How does social nudity help reduce stress?

There are various ways to reduce stress. You could take prescription tranquilizer drugs, such as anxiolytics¹⁴, but they can be addictive and have other undesirable side effects. Alcohol works too, but certainly has its own problems, as do recreational drugs – apart from being illegal. None of these solutions deal with the cause of your stress. The real solution might be to quit a job that is just too unpleasant to bear, get out of a bad relationship, or move to a place with lower living costs. But such things are more easily said than done, and suppose you're stressed by something you just have little, or no, control over, like losing a job you? What can you do then?

Social nudity helps because it brings a number of inherently stress-reducing practices, opportunities, and features together. While most of the features are available separately and without the social nudity, by being a naturist you'll find are available as part of the package.

A Friendly Social Support System: One of the commonest sources of stress is loneliness and social isolation. [*It should be pointed out here that there is a vast difference between being a lone and loneliness, and not be confused. Ed.*] By definition, social nudity can take care of that. It may require considerable effort to begin with, but once managed you have a ready-made network of

like-minded people to provide plenty of friendships and socializing opportunities.

Increased Self-confidence: For reasons covered above, chronic fear and anxiety are big stressors. Fear of failure in some endeavour is a very common. See post dated 19th February 2015, *Benefits of Social Nudity: Building Self-confidence*¹⁵ for a further explanation.

Body Acceptance: For many people, unhappiness about the appearance of their body is a big source of stress, and perhaps an obstacle to a happy social life. See post dated 1st February 2015, *Benefits of Social Nudity: Body Acceptance*¹⁶ for more detail.

Emphasis on the Positives: Normal, everyday life is a mixture of positives and negatives. Stress results when the latter significantly exceeds the former. The world of social nudity isn't a perfect utopia – far from it, but it does distract attention away from life's negatives, and so promotes a more positive outlook on life. There's less emphasis on things like physical appearance, social status, and conformance to unreasonable social norms. People involved in social nudity want to share the pleasure of being naked, because an individual's happiness is enhanced when others are also enjoying life. Happiness is contagious.

Practice Nude Yoga and Meditation: Yoga and meditation are practices, which emphasize emptying your mind of mundane concerns, "turning off the noise upstairs". Although the details vary among different types of yoga and meditation, you learn to sharply narrow your mental focus (or unfocussed it entirely), away from stressful thoughts. Although you can do yoga and meditation alone and/or without being naked, doing them naked, as part of a group, can reinforce your motivation to continue and advance your level of mastery. Both yoga and meditation are proven to reduce high blood pressure (caused by stress), at least while engaged in the practice, so they may be beneficial after particularly stressful experiences.

Exercise Nude: As was pointed out at the start, physical exercise was an integral part of German *Lebensreform* and early nudism. And like the other components of those movements, the health benefits were emphasized. You can still get plenty of exercise without being naked or part of a group. But as with yoga and meditation, this is something that's often more satisfying as part of a group of naked people. And some types of exercise are simply not possible alone – volleyball, basketball, tennis, etc. What's the connection with stress? Again, it's the focus on the present, the here-and-now. And if exercise improves your physical fitness and general health, you may be able to lose weight and reduce psychological stress associated with obesity. If you join a landed nudist club, you also gain access to exercise facilities (swimming pools, tennis courts, gym equipment, etc.) as part of the deal.

Nude Soaking, Sauna: The indigenous people of the Americas used Sweat lodges¹⁷ long before Europeans arrived. Nobody knows when saunas were first used in Nordic countries, because it was before most of their recorded history. And many humans, who had access to them, undoubtedly used natural hot springs. Such things have been popular because they are physically relaxing and stress reducing. This is probably because of endorphins¹⁸ that reduce stressful physical pain and tension. Even if you don't own a sauna or spa yourself, if you participate in social nudity, there are probably others in the group (or club/resort) who do. [*Perhaps it should be noted here that while all this is undoubtedly true, the Nordic tradition of a Sauna*¹⁹ *has an equally long history, and with stated benefits*²⁰. *The Romans*²¹ *had similar bathing arrangements while in Ancient Greece the history of public bathing goes back as far as the 6th Century BC. Ed.*]

Nude Massage: There are many different types of massage, but most have been shown to reduce high blood pressure (caused by stress) and pain (which is a source of stress). While commercial massage providers do not encourage nudity, in spite of how any clothing interferes with a full-body massage. Many nudist clubs and resorts do offer fully nude professional massage, and many club

members have learned to perform massage themselves. Physical touch, of course, an integral part of any massage is stress-reducing by itself.

That's it. As you can see, there are a lot of ways available in social nudity that can significantly counteract psychological stress – and therefore promote physical health and quality of life.

However, as bad as stress is for health, it degrades quality of life in other ways too. As the journalist Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber wrote in *The Art of Time*²²,

What I fear most about stress is not that it kills, but that it prevents one from savouring life.

So the ways that social nudity helps control stress make this benefit even more valuable. Life is better savoured without clothes.

References

The popular science magazine *Science News* just published a *very* informative feature article on stress and health in its March 7, 2015 edition: *Chronic stress can wreak havoc on the body*²³. Highly recommended.

Here's a more technical review of the biology of how stress due to social causes leads to inflammation and other immune system problems: *Stress Fractures*²⁴ – from the January 2015 issue of *The Scientist*.

The definitive book on psychological stress for the general reader is *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*²⁵, by Robert Sapolsky. Although it's long (over 400 pages, with 100 additional pages of notes), and full of technical detail, it's well worth the effort.

Endnotes:

- ¹ <https://naturistphilosopher.wordpress.com/author/diogenes002/>
- ² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebensreform>
- ³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitamin_D
- ⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rickets>
- ⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuberculosis>
- ⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melanoma#UV_radiation
- ⁷ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stress_\(psychological\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stress_(psychological))
- ⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronic_stress
- ⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiovascular_disease
- ¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diabetes_mellitus
- ¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight-or-flight_response
- ¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circulatory_system#Human_cardiovascular_system
- ¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peptic_ulcer
- ¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anxiolytic>
- ¹⁵ <https://naturistphilosopher.wordpress.com/2015/02/19/benefits-of-social-nudity-building-self-confidence/>
- ¹⁶ <https://naturistphilosopher.wordpress.com/2015/02/01/benefits-of-social-nudity-body-acceptance/>
- ¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweat_lodge
- ¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endorphins>
- ¹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauna>
- ²⁰ <http://www.spa-london.org/sauna-vs-steam-room/>
- ²¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thermae>
- ²² http://www.amazon.co.uk/Art-Time-Jean-Louis-Servan-Schreiber/dp/0747504806/ref=sr_tc_2_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1432408977&sr=1-2-ent
- ²³ <https://www.sciencenews.org/search?st=Chronic+stress+can+wreak+havoc+on+the+body>
- ²⁴ <http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/41708/title/Stress-Fractures/>
- ²⁵ http://www.amazon.co.uk/Zebra-Ulcers-Sapolsky-published-Paperbacks/dp/B00E28GPYQ/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1432409418&sr=8-2&keywords=Why+Zebra+Don%27t+Get+Ulcers%2C+Third+Edition