



Celebrating Your Healthy Lifestyle During Earth Month an Interview with Dr. Stacy Beller Stryer- Associate Medical Director of Park RX America (PRA)

By Jenn Simms

April is a month full of showers and flowers and has been dedicated as “Earth month”. As a naturalist, I love the idea of celebrating the Earth for the entire month. But, finding time to give back to the planet can be tricky, especially when juggling work, family, a social life, and more. How can I contribute towards a self-care routine for the Earth, when I feel pulled into so many different directions?

What if I told you that the Earth had a self-care tip to help us create a healthier lifestyle and all it involved was to walk out the front door?

“Just get outside” is what Dr. Stacy Beller Stryer, Associate Medical Director of PRA, told me to do. She is a board-certified physician whose company’s mission is to decrease the burden of chronic disease, increase health and happiness, AND foster environmental stewardship. How do they achieve this mission? Through prescribing nature. I wasn’t exactly sure what that meant, so I sat down with her to ask a few questions.

1. What does it mean to prescribe nature and how does it work? How can someone obtain a prescription?

Prescribing nature is very similar to prescribing medication for a medical condition but instead of prescribing, let's say, an antibiotic for an ear infection, we prescribe time outside for conditions such as anxiety, depression, diabetes or obesity, among others. Just like a regular prescription, a nature prescription is very specific, where the outdoor place, type of activity, time and days of the week one goes to this location are all included. Being specific increases the chances someone will fill the prescription and holds them more accountable. Anyone can tell their provider they read about nature prescriptions and want one written for themselves. They might have to give the website, parkrxamerica.org, to their providers if they are unfamiliar with it. Another option is to print out a prescription from the website, fill it out and hand it to a provider who can then continue to write future prescriptions and follow up on a regular basis. I think it would be so helpful to work together to make going outdoors second nature (pun intended), like getting dressed in the morning.

2. Why was PRA created?

It began as a park prescription program to integrate a searchable map to make it easier for providers to find a nearby park or greenspace for their patients anywhere in the country, with thousands searchable by location. However, this was limiting the ability to write prescriptions for two reasons. First, not every park in the country is in our database and second, not everybody has a park close to their home, particularly those living in urban areas and amongst minority populations. We want everybody to have equal access to nature, no matter where they live. So we developed a custom destination, where any natural space can be prescribed, preferably a place that is close, free and where the patient feels safe. Sometimes a patient is unable to go outside for a variety of reasons, so a prescription can even be written to spend time among plants indoors or watching nature and/or wildlife from a window.

3. Your mission supports environmental stewardship, what is one way that someone can develop a nature self-care routine AND give back to the Earth at the same time?

Because we spend most of our time indoors these days, we have lost our connection with our surroundings and the environment. Many studies have shown that spending time outdoors increases environmental stewardship and a connection with the environment. So by merely motivating people to get outside

to take care of themselves and their own health, we can increase their care and nurturing of our environment and earth.

And there you have it; thank you Dr. Stryer! We can lower our stress by spending more time outdoors and give back to Earth. As educators, naturalists, and outdoor enthusiasts, together, we can work on a self-care routine for the Earth throughout April, and encourage our park visitors to do the same. But most importantly, we can also work on a self-care routine for ourselves. Learn more at: <https://parkrxamerica.org>