

MAKING MUD PIES: 8 WAYS MUDDY KIDS ARE HEALTHIER

Did you know that kids today are getting half the outside time their parents did? Think back to your childhood. Are your fondest memories of playing video games or are they of climbing trees, building forts, and splashing in puddles? Healthy kids get outside more than their peers.

Between the screens and parent's aversion to letting their kids get dirty – outdoor time is way down. The average kid aged 8-10 spends 6 hours a day in front of a screen for entertainment! (1) 6 hours... that's like binge-watching all 3 Cars movies and having time to start Planes! All this screen time is doing nothing to improve their health. It's actually detrimental to their health.

Making sure your kids get outside to play is just as important to their health as making sure they are eating a healthy diet and getting enough sleep.

This could mean (and should mean) they will be getting muddy. Kids in their natural environment, exploring the outdoors, will naturally get dirty. Here's why you should embrace it and put down the wet wipes.

1- STRONGER IMMUNE SYSTEMS

Indoor environments are often over sterilized. The growing immune system needs to be exposed to stresses to get strong. Stresses like the harmless stresses you can often find in mud pies. Think of the immune system like a muscle. To get that muscle stronger, we need to stress the muscle with exercise. When we work out sometimes our muscles get sore and ache, but the body adapts and rebuilds more muscle so that when we encounter that same amount of stress the body is stronger. It will be better able to handle the exercise and we become fit.

That is why it is so important for our bodies to be exposed to these different types of pathogens and sometimes to get sick. Once our body encounters a pathogen then our immune system creates a

memory of it for life, so when we come into contact with that specific pathogen down the road it can easily get rid of the infection and we don't get sick. Mud pies mean stronger immunity!

2-BETTER SLEEP

Decreasing screen time and increasing outdoor play will lead to earlier bed times and improved sleep. Being outside and exposed to natural light is supportive of the circadian rhythm. If your kids are getting muddy- they are getting better sleep. (2)

3- CONNECTION TO NATURE

People who spend more time outdoors are happier. Remember children who spend more time outdoors will grow up to be adults who spend more time outdoors. One study looked at adult participants who took a 50-minute urban walk compared to participants who took a 50-minute walk in nature. The ones who took a nature walk reported less anxiety, negativity, and unproductive rumination. (3)

As we become more disconnected from nature there is growing evidence that humans need nature for health and well-being. (4) As we become more disconnected from the space, so does our health and desire to protect those spaces. We know it's important to reconnect people to the outdoors. (5)

4- MORE VITAMIN D

Many Americans are [Vitamin D](https://www.thewellnessway.com/vitamin-d/) deficient because they are spending more time inside. Your body makes Vitamin D when your skin is exposed to sun. Your body turns this into a hormone that supports health and happiness by regulating 1,000 genes throughout the body. (6) [Vitamin D](https://www.thewellnessway.com/vitamin-d/) deficiency has been linked to depression. (7) Ever notice a mood boost after being outside? It will boost that immune system too! Vitamin D is also needed for strong bones.

[Vitamin D](https://www.thewellnessway.com/vitamin-d/) has plenty of benefits for adults and kids. It's hard to get all the [Vitamin D](https://www.thewellnessway.com/vitamin-d/) you need from foods

and the best way to get it is from good old-fashioned sunshine. It won't come from the light of your tablet.

5- PREVENTS OBESITY

Staying inside leads to sedentary behavior like sitting in front of televisions and tablets. Getting outside usually means an increase in physical activity like riding bikes, chasing salamanders and digging a hole to China. Children are wired to use their bodies and get active. They will find a way!

Vitamin D, better sleep, and physical activity leads to lower BMI's. The majority of children spend less than an hour playing outside on the weekends. Less than 1 hour! Studies show the more time children spend outside the less chance they are overweight. (8)

6- LEARNING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Making mud pies isn't easy and neither is making forts. These pursuits require creative thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills that are put to use regularly in the great outdoors. (9)



Gross motor skills are when children are using their larger muscles for crawling, running, jumping, and more. The outdoors leaves lots of space for using these skills in big ways which has been connected to better academic performance, learning and memory. Interesting, less structured, and fun play for preschool children is linked to better academic performance into elementary school. (10)

7- MUD PIES AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

When children are outside they are more likely to be playing with friends. When they are making mud pies and using their problems solving skills they will be working together. By figuring out problems together they build strong connections and learn how to be a good friend. Even when your friend throws a mud pie at you!

When making mud pies you need to decide the best tools and the best way to collect mud. The more people working on mud pies, the more mud pies there are! It helps if you are working together!

8- DECREASES NEED FOR GLASSES

Playing outside helps prevent nearsightedness in children. (11) Poor eye health and nearsightedness is on the rise. Children who have two nearsighted parents are at higher risk of nearsightedness but if they spend more time outside they have the same risk as children without parents with nearsightedness. How much money can you save in glasses if your kids play outside?

HEALTHY KIDS GET OUTSIDE!

Children today will spend half the time outside their parents did and will be unhealthier because of it. You can't replace good outdoor time with structured play to get all the benefits. So, let them play! You might find a corner of your yard dug up for mud pies and they will track mud into the house. Just smile! They are learning and getting healthier! Healthier children means healthier adults!

Written By Dr. Mitch Sutton

Check Out Doc's Sunscreen Quick Tip:

RESOURCES

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/multimedia/infographics/getmoving.htm>
(<https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/multimedia/infographics/getmoving.htm>)
2. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/apa.13285>
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