



# Crestwood Behavioral Health, Inc.

## Health and Wellness News



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## Forest Bathing

Research shows that spending time in nature has both physical and mental benefits. Exposure to greenery, whether it is the deep forest, an urban park, or even a small garden has been shown to produce physical and mental health benefits, such as stress reduction and improved immunity.

In the 1980s in Japan, the practice of forest bathing became popular. One part gentle exercise and one part mindfulness, forest bathing is based on a Japanese practice called *Shinrin-yoku*, which means “bathing in the forest”. This can

be as simple as taking a walk in nature and being mindful of the wilderness around you, or it can be structured in the form of a class or guided meditation in a forest setting. The idea is to use all of your senses to observe and “bathe” in the presence of nature.

Many people live in urban areas far from a natural setting. Even more of us may be physically near nature but spend most of our time indoors, in cars, and interacting with technology. Forest bathing ideally removes us from all that and puts us entirely in the restorative arms of mother nature.

Studies have shown that forest bathing can reduce cortisol levels, heart rate, and blood pressure. It can improve our mood, mental health, and possibly our immune system function. It is something anyone can do, at any fitness or ability level.

Here are some easy steps you can take to begin to practice forest bathing on your own.

First, find a spot with enough nature that you can wander aimlessly through it for an hour or two. This might be a park, a forest preserve, or even a large field. There are also studies that suggest being near water, or “blue” nature, may be even more restorative than being near “green” nature, so rivers, lakes, and

beaches are also good spots.

Second, leave electronics behind. As tempting as it may be to snap some pictures for your social media, resist that temptation! If you simply must bring a device (for safety reasons, for example), power it down and put it away.

Third, don't have an agenda. Don't worry about burning calories or getting your heart rate up. Just wander. Use all five of your senses to experience nature. What does the forest smell like? What does the grass feel like as you stroll through it? Can you hear birds, insects, or other animals? If you are near the ocean, can you taste the salt in the air? Dip your toes in a stream. Lie down in the shade of a tree. Admire a flower.

For many, unwinding and disconnecting in this way is not easy. If you have trouble experiencing the joy of forest bathing on your own, look for guided classes. Trained guides can lead you through a walk or series of activities that help you connect with nature and disconnect from the busy, often stressful world we live in.

*“Come to the woods, for here is rest. There is no repose like that of the green deep woods...” - John Muir*



## California Bans Four Food Additives

A couple of newsletters ago, we shared an article about the importance of eating whole foods and avoiding unnecessary food additives of unknown or questionable safety ([Health & Wellness Newsletter, Issue 38, Eating "Whole" Foods](#)). Since then, California legislature has successfully banned four out of the five food additives discussed: **Red Dye No. 3, potassium bromate, brominated vegetable oil and propylparaben**. In order to allow time for food manufacturers to reformulate their products, the law goes into effect on January 1, 2027. Entities that manufacture or sell foods containing these additives in California will face steep fines after this date.



As mentioned in the previous article, Red Dye #3 is found in candies, icings, drinks, and other highly processed foods requiring a red color. Brominated vegetable oil is used as a stabilizer in many citrus-flavored sodas. Potassium bromate acts as a leavening agent in many shelf-stable baked goods such as breads, tortillas, crackers, and pastries, and propylparaben acts as a preservative in many of the same products. These ingredients have been linked to certain cancers, reproductive and endocrine disruptions, and neurobehavioral concerns such as hyperactivity in children. In fact, one of the strongest arguments for this legislation was its role in protecting children, who may consume more of these products than adults and who are still physically and mentally developing. Many of these additives have already been banned in the European Union, and New York State has proposed a similar bill that has yet to be enacted.

Overall, this is great news. If you live in California, in 3 years, you won't have to read labels at the grocery store or inquire about ingredients in restaurants in order to avoid these harmful additives. The bad news is foods containing these ingredients can still be legally sold in California until the ban goes into effect. So, for now, keep reading those ingredient lists and choosing unprocessed foods whenever possible.

## WHO Recommends Avoiding Artificial Sweeteners

Artificial sweeteners are another food additive discussed in this newsletter in the past. There are a variety of them available today such as aspartame, saccharin, sucralose and stevia and most are used to deliver sweetness without added calories. Some have been associated loosely with certain health risks, such as cancer, but many people still use them in an effort to manage their weight or diabetes. In May of 2023, however, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that artificial sweeteners are not effective in managing weight or disease and may actually increase the risks of developing the chronic diseases that people use them to avoid, such as diabetes type II and heart disease.

In July, they went a step further when one WHO committee also declared aspartame a potential human carcinogen. While there was disagreement even in the organization itself, with another committee recognizing it as safe, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, or I.A.R.C., had previously concluded that aspartame is a potential human carcinogen based on studies linking it to liver cancer.

The WHO's recommendations are based on a review of available evidence, and do not directly affect the policies of any individual country, so you won't see artificial sweeteners disappear from the shelves anytime soon, but you may want to reconsider your use of them. Aspartame is found in many popular diet sodas, sugar-free gums, table-top sweeteners like Equal and NutraSweet, and other sugar-free products.



## Spirituality Corner: Exploring Spiritual Health through Media

What helps you relax and feel peace? What gives you meaning or purpose in life? Answering these questions for yourself can be a lifelong process as you develop your spiritual wellness. It's well worth the effort, as individual practice around spirituality (religious and non-religious) can impact our ability to cope, rehabilitate, connect with others, and find meaning. Oftentimes it can be helpful to grow our spirituality through inspirational media, like podcasts and books, looking for something that resonates and then exploring further. Below is a very small selection of popular podcasts and books to get you started. Consider selecting one of the following to explore this year.



### Podcasts

**Oprah's SuperSoul:** "Awaken, discover and connect to the deeper meaning of the world around you ... All designed to light you up, guide you through life's big questions and help bring you one step closer to your best self."

**Being Well with Forrest Hanson and Dr. Rick Hanson:** "explores how we can step out of the way we've been, and into a new way of thinking, doing, and being."

**Tara Brach:** "addresses the value of mindfulness meditation and self-compassion in relieving emotional suffering, serving spiritual awakening and bringing healing to our world."

**Making Sense with Sam Harris:** "explores important and controversial questions about the human mind, society, and current events."

**On Being with Krista Tippett:** "Wisdom to replenish and orient in a tender, tumultuous time to be alive. Spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, and poetry. Conversations to live by."

**Eckhart Tolle: Essential Teachings:** "learn to quiet your mind, separate your ego from your true self and live a fully present life ... inspire you to seek your own higher purpose."

### Books

**Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of Science, Nature, and Spirit** by Lyanda Lynn Haupt: "Our bodies, thoughts, minds, and spirits are affected by the whole of nature, and they affect this whole in return. In this time of crisis, how can we best live upon our imperiled, beloved earth?"

**This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us** by Cole Arthur Riley: "In her stunning debut, the creator of Black Liturgies weaves stories from three generations of her family alongside contemplative reflections to discover the "necessary rituals" that connect us with our belonging, dignity, and liberation."

**Man's Search for Meaning** by Viktor E. Frankl: "Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's memoir has riveted generations of readers with its descriptions of life in Nazi death camps and its lessons for spiritual survival. Based on his own experience and the stories of his patients, Frankl argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose."

**Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life** by Richard Rohr: "This important book explores the counterintuitive message that we grow spiritually much more by doing wrong than by doing right--a fresh way of thinking about spirituality that grows throughout life."

**Braiding Sweetgrass** by Robin Wall Kimmerer: "In a rich braid of reflections that range from the creation of Turtle Island to the forces that threaten its flourishing today, she circles toward a central argument: that the awakening of a wider ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. For only when we can hear the languages of other beings will we be capable of understanding the generosity of the earth, and learn to give our own gifts in return."

**The Book of Joy** by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams: "A discussion between two spiritual leaders about how to find joy in the face of suffering."

*This article was contributed by our Wellness Ambassador, **Erin Lubniewski**, Occupational Therapist at Crestwood Treatment Center Fremont. (If you are interested in becoming a Wellness Ambassador for your campus, please contact Margaret at [mclayton@cbhi.net](mailto:mclayton@cbhi.net).)*



## Stuffed Delicata Squash

Most winter squash is incredibly nutritious, packed with fiber, vitamins C and A, and potassium. One drawback to preparing and eating many varieties, however, is its thick, tough skin, which is usually removed before cooking. I have cut myself on more than one occasion trying to peel a butternut squash. That is why I love delicata squash. Its taste is very similar, it is full of all the health benefits of its tougher cousins, but its skin, like its name, is delicate. It does not need to be removed and can be eaten along with the rest of the squash. The following recipe for stuffed delicata squash is very versatile--feel free to swap out ingredients and use what you have on hand. It can be eaten as a main course with a side salad or soup, or it can be served as a hearty side dish. This recipe is vegetarian, but meat eaters can halve the grain and add about ½ pound of cooked ground meat if desired. To make it vegan, omit the cheese. To make it gluten-free, choose quinoa or brown rice as your grain. Makes 4 servings.

### Ingredients

2 delicata squashes  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1 cup farro or other grain  
1/2 bunch kale, washed and chopped  
1/4 cup chopped onion or shallot  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
1/3 cup dried fruit such as cranberries, currants or golden raisins  
1/3 cup chopped nuts such as walnuts or hazelnuts, or pine nuts  
1/4 cup lemon juice  
1/2 cup parmesan cheese, divided  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Chopped fresh parsley for garnishing



Rinse the outsides of the delicata squash and then carefully cut them in half the long way. Use a spoon to scoop out the seeds (these can be roasted and eaten like pumpkin seeds, by the way!). Lightly brush the insides of the squash with olive oil and sprinkle them lightly with salt. Roast in a 425°F oven face down on a baking sheet for about 20 minutes. Flip the squash over and cook for another 5 minutes or so, until easily pierced by a fork. Meanwhile, cook the farro or other grain according to package instructions. In the last 5 minutes of the cooking time, add the chopped kale to the cooking water. In another pan over medium heat, add the remaining oil and sauté onions and garlic. Stir in the cooked farro and kale, nuts, and dried fruit and heat until warmed through. Remove from heat and add the lemon juice, fresh parsley and half the parmesan cheese and stir to combine. Taste and add salt and pepper if desired. Stuff the squash halves with the farro mixture, top with the remaining cheese, and return to the oven just until the cheese has melted, about 5 minutes. Serve 1 delicata squash half per person.

*"The table is a meeting place, a gathering ground, the source of sustenance and nourishment, festivity, safety, and satisfaction. A person cooking is a person giving: Even the simplest food is a gift."*

**-Laurie Colwin**

### Any Health and Wellness News Questions?

Contact Margaret M. Clayton, M.S. at:  
[mclayton@cbhi.net](mailto:mclayton@cbhi.net)