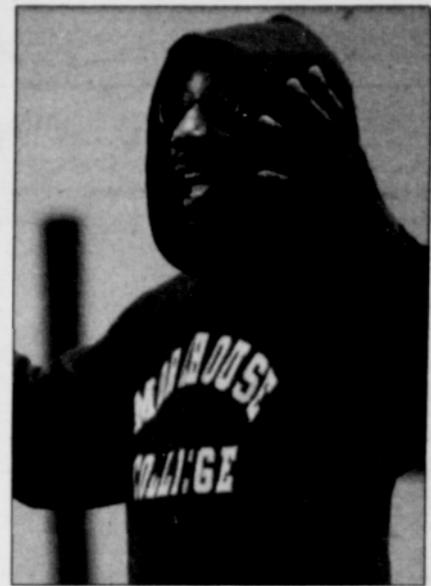


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A Bright and Healthy Future

Go outdoors and play a part in good health

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

With the arrival of spring, it's a lot easier to go outside and soak in the sun's rays, which have been proven to positively impact health more than residents realize.

"We know that light has various affects on the body," said Dr. Miles Hassell, 54, medical director of Providence Integrative Medicine Program at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. "But we let the weather be an excuse to not get outdoors enough."

Although many Portlanders don't believe they can benefit from the sun while the rainclouds cover the sphere from view, Hassell said, even on a grey day, he prescribes everyone with an everyday dose of the outdoors.

According to Hassell, who specializes in integrative therapy, which blends conventional with alternative medicine, the affects of light on the human body can be divided into two categories. "One is the affect on the brain and subsequently on your hormone levels," he said.

The exposure to sunlight affects your circadian rhythm, he added, which reproduces the light and dark cycle that involves sleep, alertness levels and hormone fluctuations, which cause depression and mood changes.

For people who are experiencing depression, they can improve their mental outlook with exposure to brighter light, he said, "Even a dark day outside is brighter than a bright day inside."

Although Hassell explained the medical community has a poor understanding as to why sunlight has such a drastic affect on human health, he said there is good evidence that it works.

The second category relates to the effect of sunlight on skin, he said.

"When certain wavelengths of sunlight strike the skin, it causes a series of chemical



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Sunshine on the downtown waterfront on Monday brings more people outdoors to exercise or just enjoy the warmth of the sun after the cold and wet days of winter. Exposure to natural light, even on a cloud covered day, has health benefits.

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