

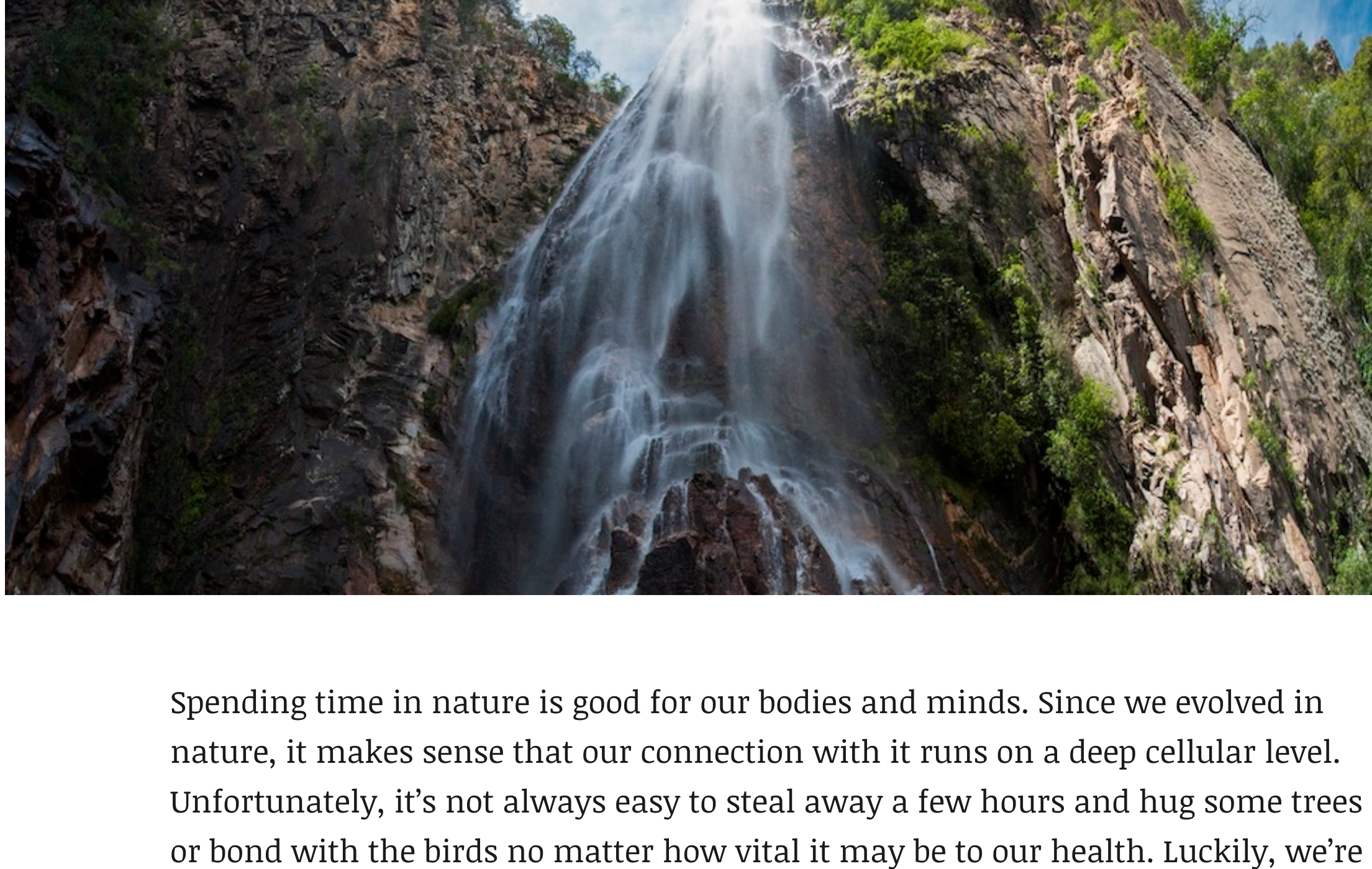


MAINTAINING PRACTICING

3 Ways to Connect With Nature (When You Can't)

BY GINA KELLY
APRIL 2, 2021

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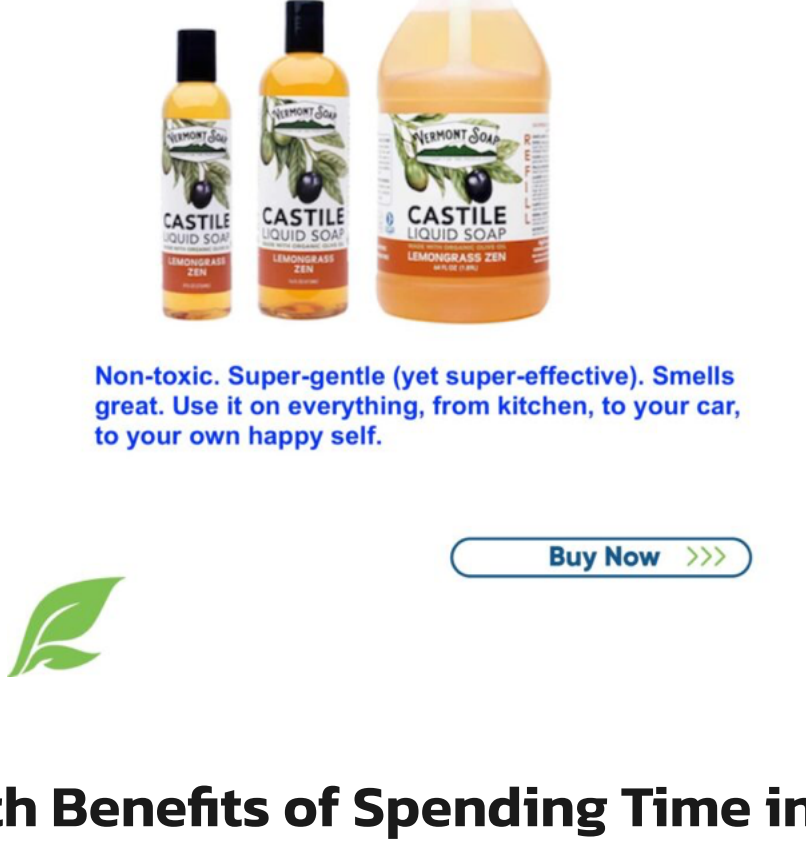
Spending time in nature is good for our bodies and minds. Since we evolved in nature, it makes sense that our connection with it runs on a deep cellular level. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to steal away a few hours and hug some trees or bond with the birds no matter how vital it may be to our health. Luckily, we're able to reap some of the benefits of spending time in nature without actually having to be there.

Why Nature is Crucial to our Health and Wellbeing

For thousands of years, humans have intuitively understood how important nature is to our wellbeing. It's only in the last 100 years or so that we lost our connection with the outside world. We spend most of our time inside, and many of us are sicker than ever before. Researchers started studying the correlation between our health and nature. They [discovered](#) experiencing nature:

- lowers blood pressure
- boosts immunity
- reduces stress
- increases attention and focus

Keeping this in mind, it doesn't take much to see how important nature is to our health. Our lifestyles are increasingly complex though. As we continue to move our busy lives indoors and our access to the outdoors dwindles, we need solutions.



Replicating the Health Benefits of Spending Time in Nature

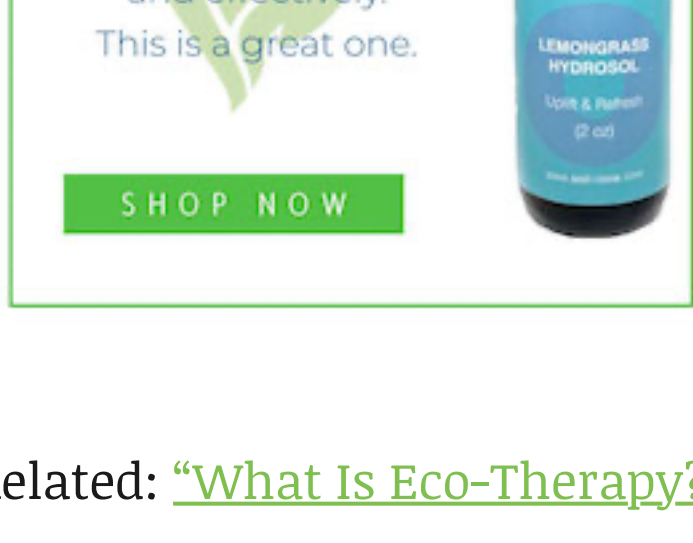
Nothing can exactly replace a true outdoor experience, but we can somewhat recreate the effects of being in nature. Below are three ways to experience nature inside and enjoy some of those health benefits:

1. Through Smell

The nose has a direct pathway to the brain making smell a very powerful sense. One specific smell can take us back to a time and place we haven't recalled in years. It can also alert us to danger, such as rotten food or gas leaks. But what is the link between our sense of smell and the health benefits of nature?

Immunologist Qing Li has been studying phytoncides, the aerosols emitted by trees and plants, for years. Those aerosols have a great effect on our health, according to Li. In one of his [experiments](#), he found that pumping phytoncides into hotel rooms lowered stress hormones and boosted immunity in participants of the study. There have since been other studies with similar results.

We can replicate the scent of nature through aromatherapy. There are essential oils dedicated to evergreen, cypress, and cedar phytoncides. Space diffusers are a great way to spread the scent of these trees throughout a room similar to the way Li conducted his study. You can also "wear" the oil in a diffuser bracelet or necklace or add it to a bottle and spray it around the house or office.



Related: ["What Is Eco-Therapy?"](#)

2. Through Sight

Vision is our most dominant sense. Most people claim they're "visual learners," which is spot-on. It's estimated that 85% of the way humans learn, perceive, and think is through sight. So, it isn't surprising that physically looking at nature has a profound effect on our health.

In 1984, Roger Ulrich published a [study](#) based on the recovery of surgical patients. The patients placed in a room overlooking a green landscape recovered faster, required less pain medication, and were discharged earlier than those who were placed in rooms staring at brick walls. Many other researchers have since concluded that viewing nature allows us to recover from illness faster and helps us sustain good health.

Not only does gazing at some trees outside your window keep you healthier, but you can also simply look at pictures of nature. A majority of [studies](#) revealed that looking at real-life photos of forests, oceans and other natural environments decreased heart rates and lowered blood pressure. Surrounding yourself with indoor plants, trees, and flowers also leads to a more relaxed state.

3. Through Sound

Our ability to hear, process, and create language is more closely linked to the songbird than to other primates. Some scientists believe the songbird's brain structure may even help to explain how human language evolved! Humans are connected to the sounds of nature more than many of us realize.

But can listening to the sounds of nature impart wellbeing even if we aren't physically *in* nature? A group of researchers in England ran an [experiment](#) in which participants listened to a series of natural and artificial sounds. An MRI measured their brain activity and heart rate monitors measured their nervous system activity throughout the experiment. The natural soundscapes produced healthier outcomes, such as curtailing mental fatigue and increasing external awareness. The man-made sounds didn't.

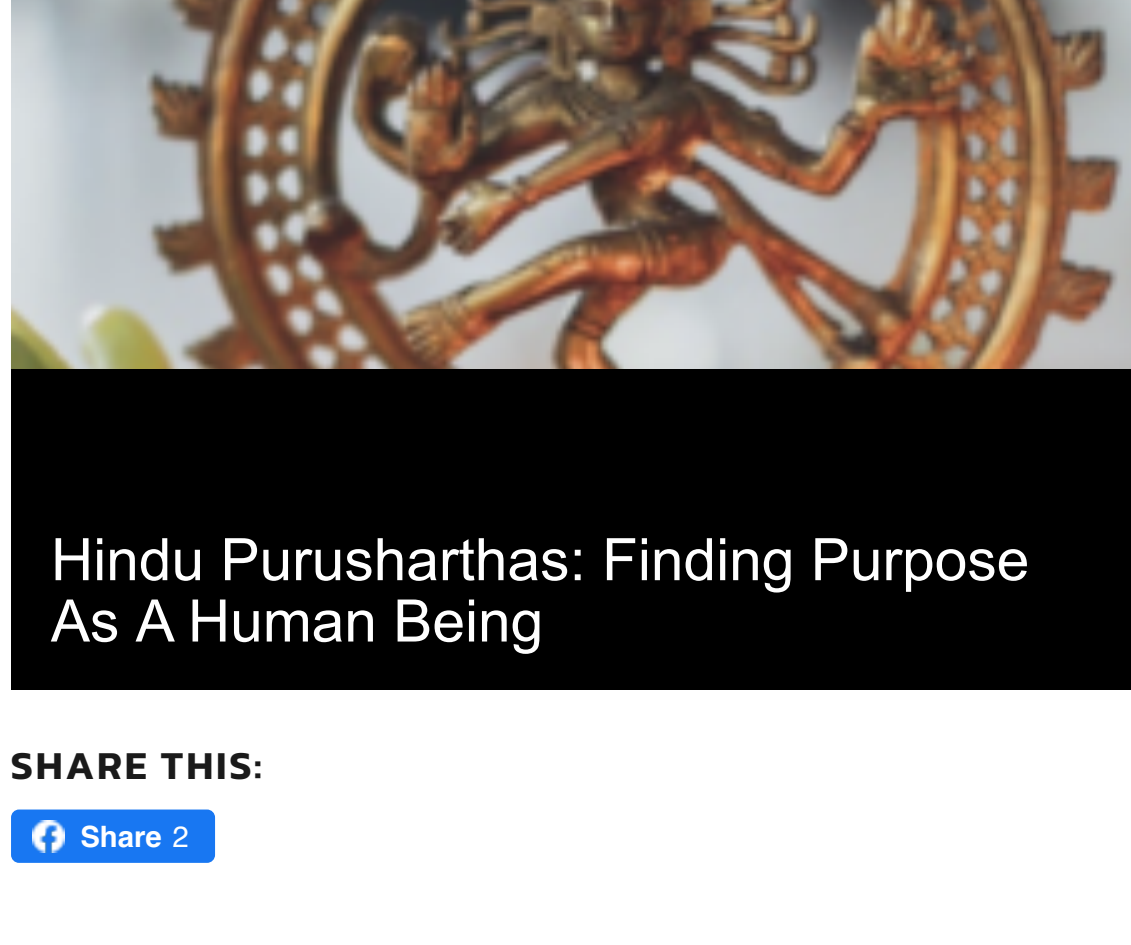
The sounds of nature offer tremendous health benefits. When we're stressed out, listening to waves crashing on the shore or birds singing a song calms us down. Not only do those sounds make us more relaxed but they can increase focus and concentration. Those sounds can even positively affect our productivity levels. There are plenty of ways to listen to the sounds of nature from downloading nature apps to playing YouTube videos. Find the right natural sound for you, and you'll be relaxed in no time.

While there's no real replacement for being outside in nature, we can mimic some of the benefits when it's not possible to visit a park or forest. So, even though we can't breathe in the fresh air and absorb some sun on our skin countless hours every day, at least we don't need to be fully cut off from nature.

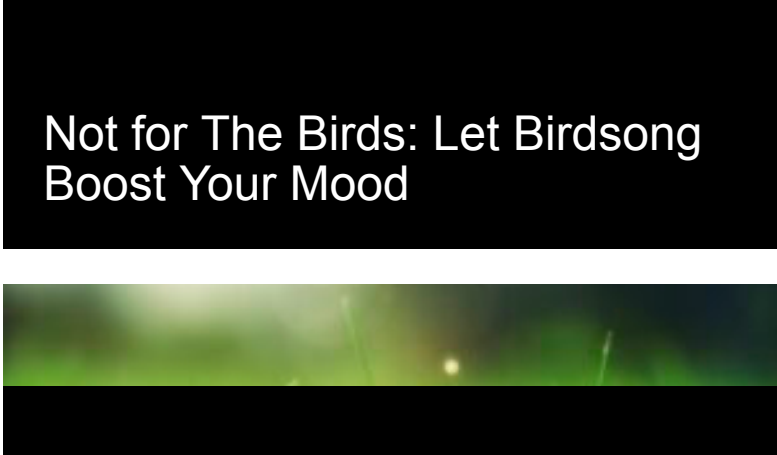
-Gina Kelly

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Gina Kelly is a freelance wellness and lifestyle writer. She specializes in copywriting, content writing, and editing. When Gina isn't writing, you can find her hiking the hills of northern New Jersey or reading historical fiction. Connect with her on Twitter @GinaNicoleKelly or visit her website, [www.ginanicolekelly.com](#).

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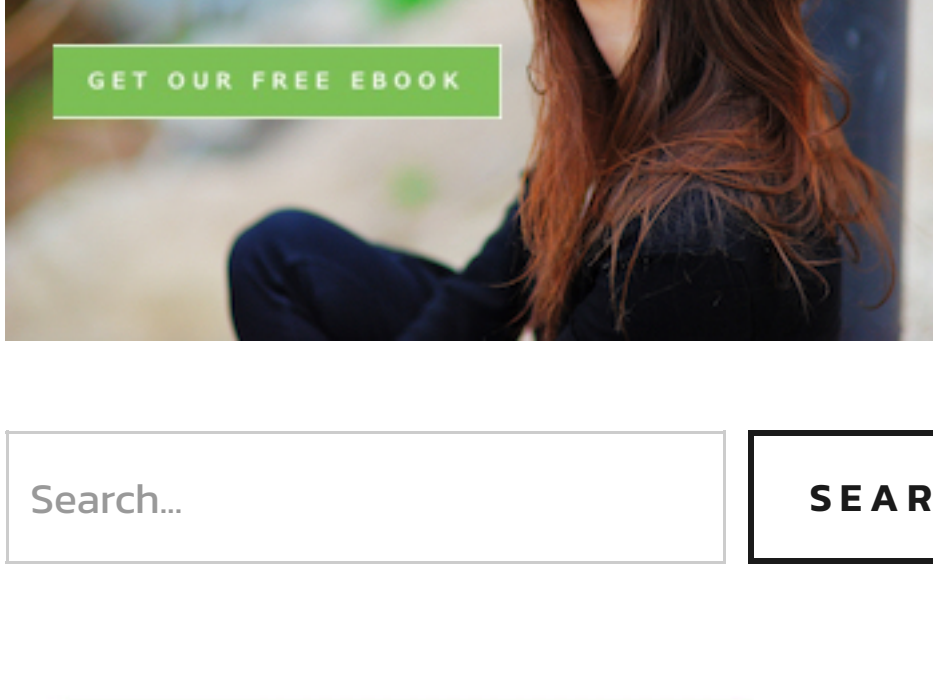
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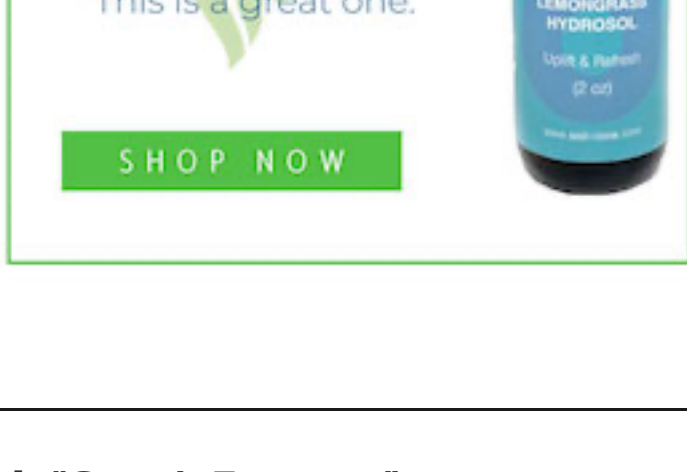
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