

The Benefits of Nature for Mental Health

Taking care of your mental health has never been more important as we learn to navigate a world post pandemic. Time spent in nature has many benefits, with reports showing that [45% of people](#) in the UK visited green spaces to help them cope throughout the pandemic. There are many healing benefits of connecting with nature - whether that's through going for a walk in your local green area or hiking a mountain.

Exercising outdoors increases the production of endorphins - neurotransmitters known for their mood boosting capabilities. Increased levels of endorphins can leave you feeling calm and clear-headed, according to [Premier Health](#). [Engaging in physical activity](#) can reduce the risk of mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, and doing so among a green space can give you additional benefits. Walking or running are forms of exercise that, when done in natural environments as opposed to indoors, reduce feelings of anger, fatigue and/or sadness. Research revealed that individuals who spent [90 minutes](#) walking in a natural area, compared with those who walked in a high-traffic area, showed lower activity levels in a part of the brain associated with depression.

Spending time outdoors allows us to source vitamin D - vitamin D is [thought to play](#) a role in mental health as it regulates mood and decreases symptoms of anxiety and depression. Research into lower levels of vitamin D in fact have been identified as a risk factor for anxiety and depression. Regular exposure to the sun is the most natural way to get vitamin D. [Healthline](#) recommends getting 10 to 30 minutes of midday sunlight several times a week in order to get the most benefit for your mental health.

Nature has been noted for its healing capabilities and has been shown to play a part in helping individuals cope with pain. A [study](#) of patients recovering from gallbladder surgery revealed that those recovering with a view of trees appeared to tolerate pain better, experience fewer negative effects and spent less time in hospital.

To those of us that love to decorate our homes with green, leafy indoor plants, we can also reap the great benefits that nature has to offer our mental health - from the comfort of our own four walls! In fact, a [study](#) published in the *Journal of Physiological Anthropology* suggests that interacting with indoor plants can reduce physiological and psychological stress. The results also indicated that indoor plants positively impact the autonomic nervous system by “suppressing sympathetic activity, which often increases when a subject is exposed to a stressor”, helping to reduce stress and anxiety.

[Mental Health Foundation](#) say the benefits of spending time in nature are often correlated with the way our senses connect us to the environment surrounding us. This includes the shapes in nature, any unique or strong scents you smell and the fascination of mother nature which promotes feelings of relaxation. With many of us living in fast-paced, digital consumed lives and

working long hours, there are many elements within these environments that affect our mental health which is why spending time in nature is so vital. Exposure to nature also [supports our physical wellbeing](#) by lowering the production of stress hormones, blood pressure, muscle tension, heart rate and muscle tension.

When immersed in nature, you almost have no choice but to bring your attention to the present moment – a positive for mental health. Whether it's admiring the swaying branches of the sturdy trees or watching waves build and crash on the sand, you are paying attention to the here and now - also known as mindfulness. [Mindfulness](#) is bringing your attention or awareness to your thoughts, feelings, body, and environment. The practice of doing this without judgement [has been found](#) to decrease stress and has played an important part in the treatment of mental health problems including anxiety and depression.

Previous studies have also indicated you can experience great benefits from the sounds of nature, wherever you are. [A study of participants](#) who listened to natural sounds such as waves crashing showed that they performed better on demanding cognitive tests compared with those who listened to urban sounds of traffic and noises of a busy cafe. With access to websites such as YouTube, you can listen to these sounds at the click of a button. Take some time today to explore your local green space or scenic area. Become aware of the various shapes, colours and sounds around you and enjoy the serenity.