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10 Ways Nature Helps Your Well-Being

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Who doesn't enjoy a walk outdoors in nature? The fact that nature settings are less and less accessible to those who live in cities should be concerning, especially with respect to overall health and well-being. The fact is, however, that continuing research shows nature has multiple [benefits for your well-being](#).

More than 50 percent of the world's population lives in [urban areas](#) and that proportion is projected to increase to 70 percent by 2050. Despite many benefits of urbanization, studies show that the [mental health](#) of urban dwellers is negatively affected by their city environment, with greater prevalence of anxiety and mood disorders and an increasing incidence of schizophrenia. Finding that bit of [green space in cities](#) or spending time in nature visiting rural areas may do more than provide a temporary escape from concrete, steel and glass.

Being in nature improves creativity and problem-solving.

Ever been stumped, hit a wall, unable to arrive at a well-reasoned decision? Most people have, at one time or another. It isn't coincidence that taking time out to be in nature can result in a subsequent creativity surge and/or the sudden realization of a workable solution. Beyond that, according to [2012 research](#) published in PLoS One, there is a cognitive advantage that accrues from spending time in a natural environment. Other [research](#) published in Landscape and Urban Planning found that complex working memory span improved and a decrease in [anxiety](#) and rumination resulted from exposure to natural green space.

Individuals with [depression](#) may benefit by interacting with nature.

[Research](#) published in the Journal of Affective Disorders in 2012 suggested that individuals with major depressive disorder who engaged in 50-minute walks in a natural setting showed significant memory span increases compared to study participants who walked in an urban setting. That participants also showed increases in [mood](#) was noted, the effects were not found to be correlated with memory, leading researchers to suggest that other mechanisms or replication of previous work may be involved.

Reductions in anxiety levels may result from green exercise.

While exercise is nearly universally recommended as a means of improving overall health and well-being, the benefits of green exercise have recently been studied relative to how such activity reduces levels of anxiety. Researchers found that green exercise produced moderate short-term [reductions in anxiety](#), and found that for participants who believed they were exercising in more natural environments, the levels of reduction in anxiety were even greater.

Urban and rural green space may help mitigate stress for children and the elderly.

Relief of [stress](#) is an ongoing goal for millions of Americans living in urban areas, as well as for residents of cities across the globe. For children and the elderly, access to parks, playgrounds, gardens and other green areas in cities can help improve the health of these groups vulnerable to some of the challenges of urbanization.

Reduce stress by gardening.

Gardening can produce more than food for the table or aesthetically pleasing plants and landscaping. Working in the garden is also beneficial for reducing acute stress. So says the research from [Van Den Berg and Custers \(2011\)](#) who found reduced levels of salivary cortisol and improved mood following gardening.

A nature walk could help your heart.

Among the many health benefits ascribed to being in nature, say scientists, is the protective mechanism that nature exerts on [cardiovascular function](#). This is due to the association between improved affect and heat reduction from natural environments in urban areas. Other [research](#) found that walks in nature reduce blood pressure, adrenaline and noradrenaline and that such protective effects remain after the nature walk concludes. Japanese researchers in a [study](#) published in 2011 suggested that habitual walks in a forest environment benefit cardiovascular and metabolic parameters. Another [Japanese study](#) of middle-aged males engaging in forest bathing found

significantly reduced pulse rate and urinary adrenaline, as well as significantly increased scores for vigor and reduced scores for depression, anxiety, confusion and fatigue.

Mood and self-esteem improve after green exercise.

A 2012 [study](#) published in Perspectives in Public Health found that study participants, all of whom experienced mental health issues, engaging in exercise in nature activities showed significant improvements in self-esteem and mood levels. Researchers suggested that combining exercise, social components and nature in future programs may help promote mental healthcare. Research by [Barton and Pretty \(2010\)](#) found that both men and women experienced improvements in self-esteem following green exercise, with the greatest improvements among those with mental illness. The greatest changes in self-esteem occurred with youngest participants, with effects diminishing with age. Mood, on the other hand, showed the least amount of change with the young and the old.

Green space in a living environment increases residents' general health perception.

Not everyone lives in a natural environment, where abundant trees and open space provide welcoming respite from everyday stress and a convenient outlet for beneficial exercise. However, the addition of thoughtfully-planned open spaces in urban environments can add to city dwellers' perceptions of their general health. That's according to [2006 research](#) published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health.

Nature can improve the quality of life for older adults.

As adults age, they often experience diminished quality of life due to medical issues and mental health concerns. In a [2015 study](#) published in Health and Place, researchers found that nature exerts an influential and nuanced effect on the lives of older adults. They further suggested that a better understanding of how seniors experience both health and landscape will better inform methods to improve daily contact with nature that can lead to a higher quality of life for this population.

Natural environments promote women's everyday emotional health and well-being.

Sedentary lifestyle in urban environments has been lined with poor mental health among women. Yet, it's more than just getting up from the desk in an office environment and taking a quick walk that works best to augment overall emotional health and [well-being](#). There's increasing evidence that public access to natural environments [helps women](#) to alleviate stress and anxiety and facilitate clarity, reassurance and emotional perspective.