

21 hours ago - Health

Blue mind: Why we find the water peaceful



Carly Mallenbaum



Illustration: Natalie Peeples/Axios

There's an expression for finding peace by the water: "blue mind."

Why it matters: Being on, in, or near water has a stress-relieving and creativity-boosting impact on the brain, research finds.

Between the lines: The blue mind concept originated with the late marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols, [who's remembered](#) for his work in science and conservation.

- In his bestseller "[Blue Mind](#)," he described the phenomenon as a "mildly meditative state" that's inspired by water and "takes advantage of the neurological connections formed over millennia" that are still being discovered via newer technology, including EEG and fMRI.



"The roar of the falls seems to align my internal rhythm to the universe," writes Axios reader Karen Ikins of this scene in Lewis River, Wash. Credit: Karen Ikins

Case in point: Axios readers who sent us [photos](#) of the ocean, lakes, rivers,

and even a pool said their favorite body of water "soothes the soul," "brings peace," "is my happy place," and "seems to align my internal rhythm to the universe."

- And there are endless examples of art that have been inspired by water, [from poetry](#) and [novels](#) to [music](#) and [paintings](#).

Now, a growing body of research helps quantify the restorative power of the sea.

Less than two minutes of looking at water outdoors "is enough to activate the parasympathetic nervous system," and lower your blood pressure and heart rate, organizational psychologist Adam Grant [writes](#), based on [recent research](#).

- One possible explanation: "Since being attuned to visual cues for water helped our ancestors avoid dehydration, the mere sight of water can be a relief."

And living near water improves self-reported [well-being](#), according to [studies](#) that adjust for age and socioeconomic factors.

- By some measures, being near blue spaces is even [more beneficial](#) than proximity to green spaces.

Even views of water through windows and artwork apparently help patients recover faster.

- [In a survey](#) of people recuperating from heart surgery, those who viewed an open-water scene had lower anxiety levels and needed less pain medication than those who looked at an abstract design, a blank white panel, or even a forest scene.
- In another study suggesting that natural environments [reduce stress](#), researchers found that viewing an aquarium before oral surgery was [more effective](#) than hypnosis at inducing relaxation.



Axios reader Amanda Paulson shared a "peaceful" photo of the lagoon of Rangiroa in French Polynesia. You can spot her son paddleboarding in the distance. Credit: Amanda Paulson

In "Blue Mind," Nichols wrote that the ocean is the antithesis of screens filled with notifications that lead to anxiety. Instead, water works as "the perfect recipe to trigger restful involuntary attention."

- "Think about it: Water is changing all the time, but it's also fundamentally familiar. It seems to entertain our brains nicely with novelty plus a soothing, regular background," he said.

☁️ **My thought bubble:** I've long considered my mind blue because two of my favorite de-stressing activities are [paddleboarding](#) in the ocean and practicing yoga on a dock overlooking the water (doing a "flow," if you will).

- But now that I'm in my third trimester of [pregnancy](#), I have a new favorite way to experience the calm of water: floating, as if in my own womb.
- I'm not the only one who could benefit from [float therapy](#).



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Pressure builds on Capitol Hill for Biden to “step aside”

President Biden at the D.C. Emergency Operations Center on July 2, 2024. Photo: Bonnie Cash/UPI/Bloomberg via Getty Images

President Biden is staring down a growing consensus among [frustrated and weary congressional Democrats](#) that he should abandon his re-election bid — a sentiment that could soon spill out into public view.

Why it matters: Several House Democrats described to Axios significant movement just on Wednesday, with one saying that "over the last few hours, I am starting to hear from delegates that they really love Joe but want him to step aside."

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How Biden went from “bridge” candidate to two-term hopeful

Joe Biden at the White House on July 1. Photo: Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images

President Biden's [insistence](#) on staying in the 2024 race has seemingly defied his own pledge to serve as a transitional president to a younger generation of Democratic leaders.

Why it matters: Biden's disastrous [debate performance](#) and his team's handling of the fallout have churned [anxiety among Democrats](#) and angered [White House and campaign staff](#) as questions swirl about whether he should step aside.

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Jacob Knutson
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Biden awards Medal of Honor to Union soldiers for covert Civil War mission

President Biden speaking in Washington, D.C., on July 2. Photo: Bonnie Cash/UPI/Bloomberg via Getty Images

President Biden bestowed the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry posthumously to two U.S. soldiers who took part in a daring Civil War covert operation that involved stealing a train 200 miles behind Confederate lines.

Why it matters: The mission, which became known as the Great Locomotive Chase, was one of the earliest special operations in U.S. Army history.

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