

## Mind

# Why spending time near water gives us a powerful mental health boost

We have long known that connecting with nature in green spaces is great for our mental health. Now fresh research is showing that time near water – by the coast, rivers and even fountains in the park – is even more restorative

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WHETHER it is a bracing sea breeze, the gentle lapping of waves or the glint of

sunshine on a rippling surface, there is something deeply restorative about being in or near water. The Victorians knew this, prescribing sea air as a treatment for melancholy. So did the French, who, for centuries, sent people with ailments to natural springs. Now scientists are catching up.

We recognise the [benefits of being out in nature](https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg2206249-two-hours-a-week-spent-outdoors-in-nature-linked-with-better-health/)  [/article/2206249-two-hours-a-week-spent-outdoors-in-nature-linked-with-better-health/](https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg2206249-two-hours-a-week-spent-outdoors-in-nature-linked-with-better-health/) more keenly than ever these days. Hundreds of studies that catalogue the positive effects are being translated into health policies and urban redevelopment projects that aim to nudge people into the great outdoors and, in doing so, alleviate many of the health burdens that accompany modern life.

But as we rush off to embrace the wilds, and the accompanying boost to our health and mental well-being, we might want to stop and consider exactly where we are heading. While we are becoming increasingly preoccupied with spending time in green spaces, fresh research is showing that blue spaces – areas next to water – might give us even more benefits.

The idea that nature can give us a mental pick-me-up is nothing new. The Japanese practice of *shinrin-yoku*, or “forest bathing”, is an established tradition of connecting with nature through all the senses. It became popular in the 1980s, after studies demonstrated its calming effects on both body and mind, reducing heart rate, stress hormones and blood pressure.



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