

New research shows that coastal populations are healthier than those inland

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A new study from the European Centre for Environment & Human Health, Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Exeter, has revealed that people living near the coast tend to have better health than those living inland.

Researchers from the Centre used data from the UK's census to examine how [health](#) varied across the country, finding that people were more likely to have good health the closer they live to the sea. The analysis also showed that the link between living near the coast and good health was strongest in the most economically deprived communities.

The study used data from the 2001 census for England, which brought together responses from over 48 million people. Researchers looked at the proportion of people who reported their health as being "Good" (rather than "Fairly Good" or "Not Good") and then compared this with how close those respondents lived to the coast. They also took into account the way that age, sex and a range of social and economic factors (like education and income) vary across the country.

The results show that on average, populations living by the sea report rates of [good health](#) more than similar populations living inland. The authors were keen to point out that although this effect is relatively small, when applied to the whole population the impacts on public health could be substantial. Along with other studies the results of this work suggest that access to 'good' environments may have a role in reducing inequality in health between the wealthiest and poorest members of

society.

Previous research has shown that the coastal environment may not only offer better opportunities for its inhabitants to be active, but also provide significant benefits in terms of stress reduction. Another recent study conducted by the Centre in collaboration with Natural England found that visits to the coast left people feeling calmer, more relaxed and more revitalised than visits to city parks or countryside. One reason those living in coastal communities may attain better physical health could be due to the stress relief offered by spending time near to the sea.

Lead author of the study, Dr Ben Wheeler said: "We know that people usually have a good time when they go to the beach, but there is strikingly little evidence of how spending time at the coast can affect health and wellbeing. By analysing data for the whole population, our research suggests that there is a positive effect, although this type of study cannot prove cause and effect. We need to carry out more sophisticated studies to try to unravel the reasons that may explain the relationship we're seeing. If the evidence is there, it might help to provide governments with the guidance necessary to wisely and sustainably use our valuable coasts to help improve the health of the whole UK population".

Dr Mathew White said: "While not everyone can live by the sea, some of the health promoting features of coastal environments could be transferable to other places. Any future initiatives will need to balance the potential benefits of coastal access against threats from extreme events, climate change impacts, and the unsustainable exploitation of coastal locations."

Provided by The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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