

Coastal living boosts physical activity

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People who live close to the coast are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than inland dwellers, finds a new study released today.

The research involved participants from across England and describes a particularly noticeable effect on western – but unexpectedly not eastern – coasts of the nation.

Publishing their findings in the journal *Preventive Medicine*, the team from the University of Exeter Medical School analysed data from over 180,000 participants – collected by Natural England.

Examining the amount of [exercise](#) people get through leisure activities as well as simply getting around, the study has shown that visiting the [coast](#), rather than just living near it, is crucial in stimulating [physical activity](#).

However, when the researchers broke down the national pattern by region they found that this effect was present in the northwest and southwest of the country but not in any of the east coast regions. Lead author of the study, Dr Mathew White said:

"It's clear that our coastal paths and beaches provide a wonderful resource for encouraging and enabling physical activity. Participants reported a number of activities from simply walking to more obvious exercise such as swimming or running. However, we're unsure why we're only seeing these effects in western regions of the country. Of course, people in the east also exercise but it doesn't seem to be so connected to coastal activities. We might have uncovered untapped potential for east

coast resorts and destinations to be used to encourage exercise and promote healthy lifestyles."

The researchers also took into account differences in factors such as age, social status and season, none of which could account for the regional differences in their findings.

Regular exercise can lower the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and depression and plays an important role in keeping people healthy. Current guidelines recommend at least 150 minutes of [moderate exercise](#) each week. Recent findings have shown that people living near to the coast are healthier than those living inland and the results published today suggest that higher levels of physical activity could partly explain why.

Dr Ben Wheeler, one of the paper's co-authors said:

"Whilst not everyone can live near a beach, there are around 8 million people in England who live within 5km of the coast. Combined with over 130 million visits a year from those living further inland, it's clear that coastal locations could offer a fantastic opportunity to get more people active. Whilst plenty of questions remain unanswered, our research suggests that government policy needs to ensure these natural spaces are protected and responsibly promoted."

This study is the largest of its kind and the first to be conducted in a European country. It supports results from smaller-scale studies in Australia and New Zealand.

Provided by University of Exeter

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