

Green spaces good for grey matter

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Walking between busy urban environments and green spaces triggers changes in levels of excitement, engagement and frustration in the brain, a study has found.

Researchers at the universities of Edinburgh and York say the findings have important implications for architects, planners and [health professionals](#) dealing with an ageing population.

Promoting health

The study is part of a larger project looking at mobility, mood and place and the role of the urban [environment](#) in promoting lifelong health and wellbeing.

"To help ensure that living longer is a positive experience for everyone, we need evidence-based solutions to support lifelong health and wellbeing. These findings – and others from the same project which show how important places are for our personal and cultural memories, and for enabling us to stay connected socially – have implications for the way we design for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities so that going outdoors in younger years becomes a lifelong passion for getting out and about," says Dr Sara Tilley.

Brain activity

The study aimed to understand how older people experience different urban environments using electroencephalography (EEG), self-reported

measures, and interviews.

As part of the experiment, eight volunteers aged 65 and over (from a wider sample of 95 people aged 65 and over) wore a mobile EEG head-set which recorded their [brain activity](#) when walking between busy and green urban spaces.

The research team also ran a video of the routes the people walked, asking the participants to describe "snapshots" of how they felt. The volunteers were also interviewed before and after.

Calming green

The volunteers experienced beneficial effects of [green space](#) and preferred it, as it was calming and quieter.

"Urban green space has a role to play in contributing to a supportive city environment for older people through mediating the stress induced by built up settings. In a time of austerity, when greens spaces are possibly under threat due to pressure on council funding, we have demonstrated that these areas are important to people's [health](#). We have an ageing population which places challenges on the NHS. As the cost of looking after an ageing population continues to rise, maintaining access to [green space](#) could be a relatively low cost option for improving mental wellbeing," says Dr Chris Neale.

More information: Sara Tilley et al. Older People's Experiences of Mobility and Mood in an Urban Environment: A Mixed Methods Approach Using Electroencephalography (EEG) and Interviews, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph14020151](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14020151)

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