

Heading outdoors keeps lockdown blues at bay

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A new study has found that spending time outdoors and switching off our devices is associated with higher levels of happiness during a period of COVID-19 restrictions.

Previous academic studies have indicated how being outdoors, particularly in green spaces, can improve [mental health](#) by promoting more positive body image, and lowering levels of depression and anxiety.

Jointly led by academics from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in the UK, the Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences in Austria, and Perdana University in Malaysia, this new research examined how levels of happiness during a national lockdown were affected by being outdoors, the amount of daily screen time (use of TV, computer and smartphone) and feelings of loneliness.

Using an experience sampling method (ESM), the researchers measured levels of happiness amongst a group of 286 adults three times a day, at random intervals, over a 21-day period. This allowed the participants to provide data in [real-time](#) rather than retrospectively, helping to avoid recall biases.

The research, published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, was carried out in April 2020, when the Austrian participants were allowed to leave their homes only for specific activities, which included exercise.

It found that levels of happiness were higher when participants were outdoors rather than indoors. In addition, more daily screen time and higher levels of loneliness were both associated with lower levels of happiness. The impact of loneliness on [happiness](#) was also weaker when participants were outdoors.

Co-lead author Viren Swami, Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said: "While lockdowns can help slow down the transmission of COVID-19, research has also shown that prolonged periods of lockdown take their toll on mental [health](#)."

"Our results are important in this context because they show that being able to spend time outdoors under conditions of lockdown has a beneficial impact on psychological wellbeing. Being outdoors provides opportunities to escape from the stresses of being confined at home, maintain social relationships with others, and engage in physical activity—all of which can improve mental health.

"Our findings have practical health policy implications. Given that further [lockdown](#) restrictions have now become necessary in the UK, public health messages that promote getting some fresh air instead of staying indoors and staring at our screens could really help to lift people's mood this winter."

More information: Stefan Stieger et al, Emotional Well-Being Under Conditions of Lockdown: An Experience Sampling Study in Austria During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Journal of Happiness Studies* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s10902-020-00337-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00337-2)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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