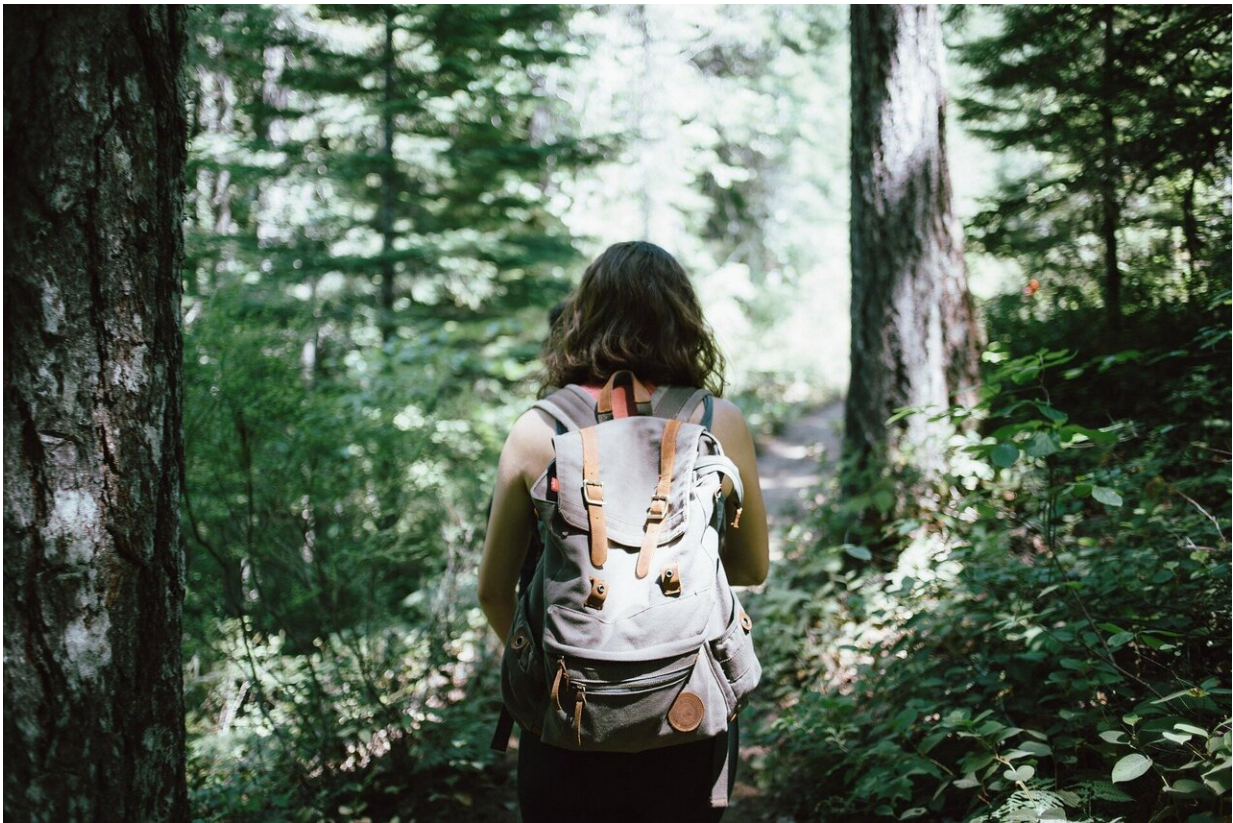


Nature-based activities can improve mood and reduce anxiety, new study shows

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Outdoor nature-based activities are effective for improving mental health in adults, including those with pre-existing mental health problems, a new study has found.

The research—led by the University of York—showed that taking part in outdoor, nature-based activities led to improved mood, less anxiety, and positive emotions.

The study found that activities lasting for 20 to 90 minutes, sustained for over the course of 8 to 12 weeks, have the most positive outcomes for improving mood and reducing anxiety.

Gardening and exercise were among the activities associated with mental health benefits. Engaging in conservation activities was also reported to make people feel better, as did 'forest bathing' (stopping in a forest to take in the atmosphere).

Large gains

Nature-based interventions (NBIs) support people to engage with nature in a structured way to improve mental health.

As part of the study, researchers screened 14,321 NBI records and analyzed 50 studies.

Lead author of the study, Dr. Peter Coventry from the Department of Health Sciences, said, "We've known for some time that being in nature is good for health and well-being, but our study reinforces the growing evidence that doing things in nature is associated with large gains in mental health.

"While doing these activities on your own is effective, among the studies we reviewed it seems that doing them in groups led to greater gains in mental health."

However, the study found there was less evidence that outdoor activities led to improved physical health. The research suggests that there need to

be more appropriate ways to measure the short and longer-term impact of nature-based activities on physical health.

Investment

The paper argues there is a need for substantial, sustained investment in community and place-based solutions such as nature-based interventions, which are likely to play important role in addressing a post-pandemic surge in demand for mental health support.

"One of the key ideas that might explain why nature-based activities are good for us is that they help to connect us with nature in meaningful ways that go beyond passively viewing nature," Dr. Coventry adds.

The research forms part of the new 'Environment and Health' research theme, supported by the York Environmental Sustainability Institute (YESI). As part of the same theme, Dr. Coventry and co-author Professor Piran White are now working with partners at the University of Central Lancashire to understand the health benefits of green social prescribing, in a study funded by the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership.

Academics from the Department of Health Sciences, Department of Environment and Geography, York Environmental Sustainability Institute (YESI), Hull York Medical School and Stockholm Environment Institute at York contributed to the study.

More information: Peter A. Coventry et al, Nature-based outdoor activities for mental and physical health: Systematic review and meta-analysis, *SSM - Population Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100934](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100934)

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