

The real benefits of walking in a winter wonderland

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Research has shown for the first time that spending time in snowy surroundings can improve how you feel about your body.

Previous studies have found that [green spaces](#), such as parks and forests,

and "blue environments," such as being at the coast or close to a river, can improve body image.

Now new research, published this month in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, has discovered that white spaces, in this case a snow-covered woodland, can have a similar effect.

Led by academics from the Medical University of Silesia, in Katowice, Poland, and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in the U.K., the research was carried out last winter and involved 87 women, with an average age of 24, who took part in small groups.

Before and after walking in a snowy woodland in the Silesia region of Poland, the participants completed a measure of their body appreciation. Before the walk, they also completed measures of connectedness to nature and self-compassion.

The study found that spending a short amount of time in nature—in this case approximately 40 minutes—results in greater body appreciation. Additionally, people who scored highly in the trait of self-compassion displayed greater improvement in body appreciation.

As well as being the first study to examine the body image benefits of spending time in a snowy landscape, it is also the first to show that these benefits can be achieved when being in nature in small groups, rather than individually.

Lead author Dr. Kamila Czepczor-Bernat, of the Medical University of Silesia, said, "A body of evidence now exists showing that nature exposure—living close to, frequenting, or engaging with environments such as forests and parks—is associated with a range of physical and psychological well-being benefits.

"However, in contrast to previous studies which have focused on the impact of blue and green natural environments on body image outcomes, ours is the first to show the positive impact on body appreciation from spending time in snow-covered environments."

Senior author Viren Swami, Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said, "Natural environments help to restrict negative appearance-related thoughts and shift attention away from an aesthetic view of the body and toward greater appreciation of the body's functionality. Positive body image is important not only in its own right, but has other beneficial effects, including more positive psychological well-being.

"Our findings demonstrate the importance of ensuring that everyone can access restorative [natural environments](#), which may be a cost-effective way of promoting healthier [body image](#), and highlight that there are significant benefits of being outside in nature, whatever the weather."

More information: Kamila Czepczor-Bernat et al, The Impact of a Woodland Walk on Body Image: A Field Experiment and an Assessment of Dispositional and Environmental Determinants, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph192114548](#)

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