

Research finds consistent link between the seaside and better health

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Seaside residents and holidaymakers have felt it for centuries, but scientists have only recently started to investigate possible health benefits of the coast. Using data from 15 countries, new research led by

Sandra Geiger from the Environmental Psychology Group at the University of Vienna confirms public intuition: Living near—but especially visiting—the seaside is associated with better health regardless of country or personal income.

The idea that being near the ocean may boost health is not new. As early as 1660, doctors in England began promoting sea bathing and coastal walks for [health benefits](#). By the mid-1800s, taking "the waters" or "sea air" were widely promoted as health treatments among wealthier European citizens. Technological advances in medicine in the early 20th century led to the decline in such practices, which are only recently gaining popularity again among the medical profession.

As part of the project "Seas, Oceans, and Public Health In Europe," led by Professor Lora Fleming, Geiger and colleagues from the Universities of Vienna, Exeter, and Birmingham, as well as Seascope Belgium and the European Marine Board, surveyed over 15,000 participants across 14 European countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom) and Australia about their opinions on various marine-related activities and their own health.

The findings, published in the journal *Communications Earth & Environment*, surprised the team. Lead author Geiger said, "It is striking to see such consistent and clear patterns across all 15 countries. We also now demonstrate that everybody seems to benefit from being near the seaside, not just the wealthy. Although the associations are relatively small, living near and especially visiting the coast can still have substantial effects on population health."

Understanding the potential benefits of coastal access for all members of society is key for policymaking. Dr. Paula Kellett from the European Marine Board said, "The substantial health benefits of equal and

sustainable access to our coasts should be considered when countries develop their marine spatial plans, consider future housing needs, and develop public transportation links."

But what does this mean for landlocked residents like Geiger and her colleagues in Austria? "Austrians and other central Europeans visit the coasts in their millions during the [summer months](#), so they too get to experience some of these benefits. Besides, we are also starting to appreciate the similar health benefits offered by [inland waters](#) such as lakes and natural pools."

More information: Sandra J. Geiger et al, Coastal proximity and visits are associated with better health but may not buffer health inequalities, *Communications Earth & Environment* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s43247-023-00818-1](#)

Provided by University of Vienna

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