

# People with lower incomes particularly benefit from nature, suggests study

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Credit: Pexels / Leah Kelley

Data from a representative sample of the Austrian population suggests that the connection between contact with nature and well-being is stronger among people with lower incomes than among people with higher incomes. However, this pattern was only found when people actively sought out nature and not when they simply lived near green

spaces.

The results suggest that the availability, access and use of green and blue spaces can play an important role in reducing income-related health inequalities. The study was carried out under the direction of the University of Vienna in collaboration with the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences and was recently [published](#) in the journal *Health & Place*.

People with low incomes are at particularly high risk of suffering from [mental health problems](#) such as depression or anxiety. One way to promote mental and physical health is through contact with nature. Time in nature is associated with lower stress levels, better [immune function](#), improved [cognitive performance](#), better sleep and greater life satisfaction, among other things. But these connections do not seem to be the same for everyone.

The researchers surveyed 2,300 people across Austria, representative of age, gender and region. The results show that high-income people generally reported higher well-being regardless of how often they visited nature, whereas well-being among the poorest in society was significantly higher among those who visited nature frequently.

In fact, poorer people who visited nature several times a week had almost as high levels of well-being as the richest respondents. This pattern was clear both for Austria as a whole and for those living in the city of Vienna.

"Our data suggests the following: If you go out into nature at least once a week all year round, the positive benefit for well-being is similar to that of receiving 1,000 euros more income per year," summarizes doctoral student and lead author Leonie Fian from the University of Vienna.

## What you do is more important than where you live

Interestingly, these relationships were only found for actively seeking out nature, but not for the amount of green space in the area surrounding the place of residence. In other words, what people do seemed more important than where they live. From a [public health perspective](#), it is therefore important to both create greener neighborhoods and natural recreation spaces and ensure that these are accessible and used, particularly by socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

"Information about attractive natural recreation areas nearby and their accessibility by [public transport](#) plays an important role, especially for people with [lower incomes](#). Therefore, these should also be easily accessible by public transport on weekends," says Arne Arnberger from the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna.

**More information:** Nature visits, but not residential greenness, are associated with reduced income-related inequalities in subjective well-being. *Health & Place*. [DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2024.103175](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2024.103175)

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